The Novels of Honoré de Balzac

THE ALKAHEST

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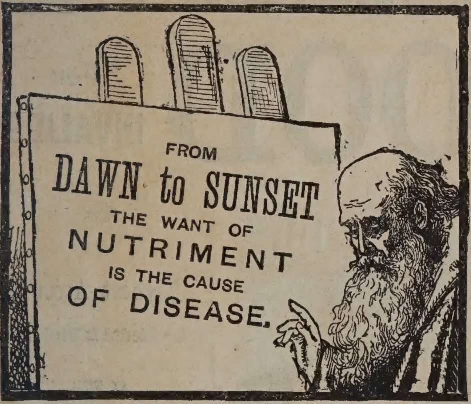

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THE ALKAHEST

Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) one of the best of modern French novelists, was born at Tours- He took early to a literary career, and though long unsuccessful he persevered until his works were received with much favour by the public- The present work is a Flemish tale, soon after the beginning of this century, illustrating the madness of a man who spent his means in chemical experiments- It was first translated into English in 1884-

HONORÉ DE BALZAC.

"Balzac is perhaps the greatest name in the post-Revolutionary literature of France. His writings display a profound knowledge of the human heart, with extraordinary range of knowledge. . . . Balzac holds a more distinct and supreme place in French fiction than perhaps any English author does in the same field of art."—*Encyclopædia Britannica.*

"Balzac, though he paints human life, perhaps, too much in tints of fate that remind us of the Greek tragedians, is far deeper and more true to nature than George Sand or Rousseau. The teachings implied in his tales come home closer to the conscience and heart than do their essays and stories. There is in him more than Gallic blood. He is the greatest of novelists, unmatched in his guild or kind as a social philosopher, and unsurpassed in his literary style. As a romance-writer he has no peer as yet in the English tongue."—*Rev. Dr. C. A. Bartol.*

"Balzac exacts more attention than most novel readers are inclined to give; he is often repulsive, and not unfrequently dull; but the student who has once submitted to his charm becomes spell-bound. . . . There are some greater novelists than Balzac, but in this one quality of intense realization of actors and scenery he is unique."—*"Balzac's Novels," by Leslie Stephen.*

"Unquestionably he ranks as one of the few great geniuses who appear by ones and twos in century after century of authorship, and who leave their mark ineffaceably on the literature of their age. And yet, among all the readers—a large class—who are from various causes unaccustomed to study French literature in its native language, there are probably very many who have never even heard of the name of Honoré de Balzac."—CHARLES DICKENS: *All the Year Round.*

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

THE ALKAHEST

OR

THE HOUSE OF CLAËS

LONDON
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS
BROADWAY, LUDGATE HILL
GLASGOW AND NEW YORK
1887

BALZAC'S NOVELS IN ENGLISH.

1. PÈRE GORIOT.
2. THE DUCHESSE DE LANGEAIS.
3. CÉSAR BIROTTEAU.
4. EUGÉNE GRANDET.
5. COUSIN PONS.
6. THE COUNTRY DOCTOR.
7. THE TWO BROTHERS.
8. THE ALKAHEST.

(Others to follow.)

THE ALKAHEST:

OR,

THE HOUSE OF CLAËS.

I.

There is a house at Douai in the *rue de Paris*, whose aspect, interior arrangements, and details have preserved, to a greater degree than those of other domiciles, the characteristics of the old Flemish buildings, so naïvely adapted to the patriarchal manners and customs of that excellent land. Before describing this house it may be well, in the interest of other writers, to explain the necessity for such didactic preliminaries, — since they have roused a protest from certain ignorant and voracious readers who want emotions without undergoing the generating process, the flower without the seed, the child without gestation. Is Art supposed to have higher powers than Nature?

The events of human existence, whether public or private, are so closely allied to architecture that the majority of observers can reconstruct nations and individuals, in their habits and ways of life, from the remains of public monuments or the relics of a home. Archæology is to social nature what comparative anatomy is to organized nature. A mosaic tells the tale of a society, as the skeleton of an ichthyosaurus opens up a creative epoch. All things are linked together, and all are therefore deducible. Causes suggest effects, effects lead back to causes. Science resuscitates even the warts of the past ages.

Hence the keen interest inspired by an architectural description, provided the imagination of the writer does not distort essential facts. The mind is enabled by rigid deduction to link it with the past; and to man, the past is singularly like the future; tell him what has been, and you seldom fail to show him what will be. It is rare indeed that the picture of a locality where lives are lived does not recall to some their dawning hopes, to others their wasted faith. The comparison between a present which disappoints man's secret wishes and a future which may realize them, is an inexhaustible source of sadness or of placid content.

Thus, it is almost impossible not to feel a certain tender sensibility over a picture of Flemish life, if the accessories are clearly given. Why so? Perhaps, among other forms of existence, it offers the best conclusion to man's uncertainties. It has its social festivities, its family ties, and the easy affluence which proves the stability of its comfortable well-being; it does not lack repose amounting almost to beatitude; but, above all, it expresses the calm monotony of a frankly sensuous happiness, where enjoyment stifles desire by anticipating it. Whatever value a passionate soul may attach to the tumultuous life of feeling, it never sees without emotion the symbols of this Flemish nature, where the throbbings of the heart are so well regulated that superficial minds deny the heart's existence. The crowd prefers the abnormal force which overflows to that which moves with steady persistence. The world has neither time nor patience to realize the immense power concealed beneath an appearance of uniformity. Therefore, to impress this multitude carried away on the current of existence, passion, like a great artist, is compelled to go beyond the mark, to exaggerate, as did Michael Angelo, Bianca Capello, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, Beethoven, and Paganini. Far-seeing minds alone disapprove such excess, and respect only the energy represented by a finished execution whose perfect quiet charms superior men. The life of this essentially thrifty people amply fulfils the conditions of happiness which the masses desire as the lot of the average citizen.

A refined materialism is stamped on all the habits of Flemish life. English comfort is harsh in tone and arid in color; whereas the old-fashioned Flemish interiors rejoice the eye with their mellow tints, and the feelings with their genuine heartiness. There, work implies no weariness, and the pipe is a happy adaptation of Neapolitan *far-niente.* Thence comes the peaceful sentiment in Art (its most essential condition), patience, and the element which renders its creations durable, namely, conscience. Indeed, the Flemish character lies in the two words, patience and conscience: words which seem at first to exclude the richness of poetic light and shade, and to make the manners and customs of the country as flat as its vast plains, as cold as its foggy skies. And yet it is not so. Civilization has brought her power to bear, and has modified all things, even the effects of climate. If we observe attentively the productions of various parts of the globe, we are surprised to find that the prevailing tints from the temperate zones are gray or fawn, while the more brilliant colors belong to the products of the hotter climates. The manners and customs of a country must naturally conform to this law of nature.

Flanders, which in former times was essentially dun-colored and monotonous in tint, learned the means of irradiating its smoky atmosphere through its political vicissitudes, which brought it under the successive dominion of Burgundy, Spain, and France, and threw it into fraternal relations with Germany and Holland.

From Spain it acquired the luxury of scarlet dyes and shimmering satins, tapestries of vigorous design, plumes, mandolins, and courtly bearing. In exchange for its linen and its laces, it brought from Venice that fairy glass-ware in which wine sparkles and seems the mellower. From Austria it learned the ponderous diplomacy which, to use a popular saying, takes three steps backward to one forward; while its trade with India poured into it the grotesque designs of China and the marvels of Japan.

And yet, in spite of its patience in gathering such treasures, its tenacity in parting with no possession once gained, its endurance of all things, Flanders was considered nothing more than the general storehouse of Europe, until the day when the discovery of tobacco brought into one smoky outline the scattered features of its national physiognomy. Thenceforth, and notwithstanding the parcelling out of their territory, the Flemings became a people homogeneous through their pipes and beer.[1]

After assimilating, by constant sober regulation of conduct, the products and the ideas of its masters and its neighbors, this country of Flanders, by nature so tame and devoid of poetry, worked out for itself an original existence, with characteristic manners and customs which bear no signs of servile imitation. Art stripped off its ideality and produced form alone. We may seek in vain for plastic grace, the swing of comedy, dramatic action, musical genius, or the bold flight of ode and epic. On the other hand, the people are fertile in discoveries, and trained to scientific discussions which demand time and the midnight oil. All things bear the ear-mark of temporal enjoyment. There men look exclusively to the thing that is: their thoughts are so scrupulously bent on supplying the wants of this life that they have never risen, in any direction, above the level of this present earth. The sole idea they have ever conceived of the future is that of a thrifty, prosaic statecraft: their revolutionary vigor came from a domestic desire to live as they liked, with their elbows on the table, and to take their ease under the projecting roofs of their own porches.

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[1] Flanders was parcelled into three divisions; of which Eastern Flanders, capital Ghent, and Western Flanders, capital Bruges, are two provinces of Belgium. French Flanders, capital Lille, is the Departement du Nord of France. Douai, about twenty miles from Lille, is the chief town of the arrondissement du Nord.

The consciousness of well-being and the spirit of independence which comes of prosperity begot in Flanders, sooner than elsewhere, that craving for liberty which, later, permeated all Europe. Thus the compactness of their ideas, and the tenacity which education grafted on their nature made the Flemish people a formidable body of men in the defence of their rights. Among them nothing is half-done, — neither houses, furniture, dikes, husbandry, nor revolutions; and they hold a monopoly of all that they undertake. The manufacture of linen, and that of lace, a work of patient agriculture and still more patient industry, are hereditary like their family fortunes. If we were asked to show in human form the purest specimen of solid stability, we could do no better than point to a portrait of some old burgomaster, capable, as was proved again and again, of dying in a commonplace way, and without the incitements of glory, for the welfare of his Free-town.

Yet we shall find a tender and poetic side to this patriarchal life, which will come naturally to the surface in the description of an ancient house which, at the period when this history begins, was one of the last in Douai to preserve the old-time characteristics of Flemish life.

Of all the towns in the Departement du Nord, Douai is, alas, the most modernized: there the innovating spirit has made the greatest strides, and the love of social progress is the most diffused. There the old buildings are daily disappearing, and the manners and customs of a venerable past are being rapidly obliterated. Parisian ideas and fashions and modes of life now rule the day, and soon nothing will be left of that ancient Flemish life but the warmth of its hospitality, its traditional Spanish courtesy, and the wealth and cleanliness of Holland. Mansions of white stone are replacing the old brick buildings, and the cosy comfort of Batavian interiors is fast yielding before the capricious elegance of Parisian novelties.

The house in which the events of this history occurred stands at about the middle of the rue de Paris, and has been known at Douai for more than two centuries as the House of Claës. The Van Claës were formerly one of the great families of craftsmen to whom, in various lines of production, the Netherlands owed a commercial supremacy which it has never lost. For a long period of time the Claës lived at Ghent, and were, from generation to generation, the syndics of the powerful Guild of Weavers. When the great city revolted against Charles V., who tried to suppress its privileges, the head of the Claës family was so deeply compromised in the rebellion that, foreseeing a catastrophe and bound to share the fate of his associates, he secretly sent wife, children, and property to France before the Emperor invested the town. The syndic's forebodings were justified. Together with other burghers who were excluded from the capitulation, he was hanged as a rebel, though he was, in reality, the defender of the liberties of Ghent.

The death of Claës and his associates bore fruit. Their needless execution cost the King of Spain the greater part of his possessions in the Netherlands. Of all the seed sown in the earth, the blood of martyrs gives the quickest harvest. When Philip the Second, who punished revolt through two generations, stretched his iron sceptre over Douai, the Claës preserved their great wealth by allying themselves in marriage with the very noble family of Molina, whose elder branch, then poor, thus became rich enough to buy the county of Nourho which they had long held titularly in the kingdom of Léon.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, after vicissitudes which are of no interest to our present purpose, the family of Claës was represented at Douai in the person of Monsieur Balthazar Claës-Molina, Comte de Nourho, who preferred to be called simply Balthazar Claës. Of the immense fortune amassed by his ancestors, who had kept in motion over a thousand looms, there remained to him some fifteen thousand francs a year from landed property in the arrondissement of Douai, and the house in the rue de Paris, whose furniture in itself was a fortune. As to the family possessions in Léon, they had been in litigation between the Molinas of Douai and the branch of the family which remained in Spain. The Molinas of Léon won the domain and assumed the title of Comtes de Nourho, though the Claës alone had a legal right to it. But the pride of a Belgian burgher was superior to the haughty arrogance of Castile: after the civil rights were instituted, Balthazar Claës cast aside the ragged robes of his Spanish nobility for his more illustrious descent from the Ghent martyr.

The patriotic sentiment was so strongly developed in the families exiled under Charles V. that, to the very close of the eighteenth century, the Claës remained faithful to the manners and customs and traditions of their ancestors. They married into none but the purest burgher families, and required a certain number of aldermen and burgomasters in the pedigree of every bride-elect before admitting her to the family. They sought their wives in Bruges or Ghent, in Liège or in Holland; so that the time-honored domestic customs might be perpetuated around their hearthstones. This social group became more and more restricted, until, at the close of the last century, it mustered only some seven or eight families of the parliamentary nobility, whose manners and flowing robes of office and magisterial gravity (partly Spanish) harmonized well with the habits of their life.

The inhabitants of Douai held the family in a religious esteem that was well-nigh superstition. The sturdy honesty, the untainted loyalty of the Claës, their unfailing decorum of manners and conduct, made them the objects of a reverence which found expression in the name, — the House of Claës. The whole spirit of ancient Flanders breathed in that mansion, which afforded to the lovers of burgher antiquities a type of the modest houses which the wealthy craftsmen of the Middle Ages constructed for their homes.

The chief ornament of the façade was an oaken door, in two sections, studded with nails driven in the pattern of a quincunx, in the centre of which the Claës pride had carved a pair of shuttles. The recess of the doorway, which was built of freestone, was topped by a pointed arch bearing a little shrine surmounted by a cross, in which was a statuette of Sainte-Geneviève plying her distaff. Though time had left its mark upon the delicate workmanship of portal and shrine, the extreme care taken of it by the servants of the house allowed the passers-by to note all its details.

The casing of the door, formed by fluted pilasters, was dark gray in color, and so highly polished that it shone as if varnished. On either side of the doorway, on the ground-floor, were two windows, which resembled all the other windows of the house. The casing of white stone ended below the sill in a richly carved shell, and rose above the window in an arch, supported at its apex by the head-piece of a cross, which divided the glass sashes in four unequal parts; for the transversal bar, placed at the height of that in a Latin cross, made the lower sashes of the window nearly double the height of the upper, the latter rounding at the sides into the arch. The coping of the arch was ornamented with three rows of brick, placed one above the other, the bricks alternately projecting or retreating to the depth of an inch, giving the effect of a Greek moulding. The glass panes, which were small and diamond-shaped, were set in very slender leading, painted red. The walls of the house, of brick pointed with white mortar, were braced at regular distances, and at the angles of the house, by stone courses.

The first floor was pierced by five windows, the second by three, while the attic had only one large circular opening in five divisions, surrounded by a freestone moulding and placed in the centre of the triangular pediment defined by the gable-roof, like the rose-window of a cathedral. At the peak was a vane in the shape of a weaver's shuttle threaded with flax. Both sides of the large triangular pediment which formed the wall of the gable were dentelled squarely into something like steps, as low down as the string-course of the upper floor, where the rain from the roof fell to right and left of the house through the jaws of a fantastic gargoyle. A freestone foundation projected like a step at the base of the house; and on either side of the entrance, between the two windows, was a trap-door, clamped by heavy iron bands, through which the cellars were entered, — a last vestige of ancient usages.

From the time the house was built, this façade had been carefully cleaned twice a year. If a little mortar fell from between the bricks, the crack was instantly filled up. The sashes, the sills, the copings, were dusted oftener than the most precious sculptures in the Louvre. The front of the house bore no signs of decay; notwithstanding the deepened color which age had given to the bricks, it was as well preserved as a choice old picture, or some rare book cherished by an amateur, which would be ever new were it not for the blistering of our climate and the effect of gases, whose pernicious breath threatens our own health.

The cloudy skies and humid atmosphere of Flanders, and the shadows produced by the narrowness of the street, sometimes diminished the brilliancy which the old house derived from its cleanliness; moreover, the very care bestowed upon it made it rather sad and chilling to the eye. A poet might have wished some leafage about the shrine, a little moss in the crevices of the freestone, a break in the even courses of the brick; he would have longed for the swallow to build her nest in the red coping that roofed the arches of the windows. The precise and immaculate air of this façade, a little worn by perpetual rubbing, gave the house a tone of severe propriety and estimable decency which would have driven a romanticist out of the neighborhood, had he happened to take lodgings over the way.

When a visitor had pulled the braided iron wire bell-cord which hung from the top of the pilaster of the doorway, and the servant-woman, coming from within, had admitted him through the side of the double-door in which was a small grated loop-hole, that half of the door escaped from her hand and swung back by its own weight with a solemn, ponderous sound that echoed along the roof of a wide paved archway and through the depths of the house, as though the door had been of iron. This archway, painted to resemble marble, always clean and daily sprinkled with fresh sand, led into a large court-yard paved with smooth square stones of a greenish color. On the left were the linen-rooms, kitchens, and servants' hall; to the right, the wood-house, coal-house, and offices, whose doors, walls, and windows were decorated with designs kept exquisitely clean. The daylight, threading its way between four red walls chequered with white lines, caught rosy tints and reflections which gave a mysterious grace and fantastic appearance to faces, and even to trifling details.

A second house, exactly like the building on the street, and called in Flanders the "back-quarter," stood at the farther end of the court-yard, and was used exclusively as the family dwelling. The first room on the ground-floor was a parlor, lighted by two windows on the court-yard, and two more looking out upon a garden which was of the same size as the house. Two glass doors, placed exactly opposite to each other, led at one end of the room to the garden, at the other to the court-yard, and were in line with the archway and the street door; so that a visitor entering the latter could see through to the greenery which draped the lower end of the garden. The front building, which was reserved for receptions and the lodging-rooms of guests, held many objects of art and accumulated wealth, but none of them equalled in the eyes of a Claës, nor indeed in the judgment of a connoisseur, the treasures contained in the parlor, where for over two centuries the family life had glided on.

The Claës who died for the liberties of Ghent, and who might in these days be thought a mere ordinary craftsman if the historian omitted to say that he possessed over forty thousand silver marks, obtained by the manufacture of sail-cloth for the all-powerful Venetian navy, — this Claës had a friend in the famous sculptor in wood, Van Huysum of Bruges. The artist had dipped many a time into the purse of the rich craftsman. Some time before the rebellion of the men of Ghent, Van Huysum, grown rich himself, had secretly carved for his friend a wall-decoration in ebony, representing the chief scenes in the life of Van Artevelde, — that brewer of Ghent who, for a brief hour, was King of Flanders. This wall-covering, of which there were no less than sixty panels, contained about fourteen hundred principal figures, and was held to be Van Huysum's masterpiece. The officer appointed to guard the burghers whom Charles V. determined to hang when he re-entered his native town, proposed, it is said, to Van Claës to let him escape if he would give him Van Huysum's great work; but the weaver had already despatched it to Douai.

The parlor, whose walls were entirely panelled with this carving, which Van Huysum, out of regard for the martyr's memory, came to Douai to frame in wood painted in lapis-lazuli with threads of gold, is therefore the most complete work of this master, whose least carvings now sell for nearly their weight in gold. Hanging over the fire-place, Van Claës the martyr, painted by Titian in his robes as president of the Court of Parchons, still seemed the head of the family, who venerated him as their greatest man. The chimney-piece, originally in stone with a very high mantle-shelf, had been made over in marble during the last century; on it now stood an old clock and two candlesticks with five twisted branches, in bad taste, but of solid silver. The four windows were draped by wide curtains of red damask with a flowered black design, lined with white silk; the furniture, covered with the same material, had been renovated in the time of Louis XIV. The floor, evidently modern, was laid in large squares of white wood bordered with strips of oak. The ceiling, formed of many oval panels, in each of which Van Huysum had carved a grotesque mask, had been respected and allowed to keep the brown tones of the native Dutch oak.

In the four corners of this parlor were truncated columns, supporting candelabra exactly like those on the mantle-shelf; and a round table stood in the middle of the room. Along the walls card-tables were symmetrically placed. On two gilded consoles with marble slabs there stood, at the period when this history begins, two glass globes filled with water, in which, above a bed of sand and shells, red and gold and silver fish were swimming about. The room was both brilliant and sombre. The ceiling necessarily absorbed the light and reflected none. Although on the garden side all was bright and glowing, and the sunshine danced upon the ebony carvings, the windows on the court-yard admitted so little light that the gold threads in the lapis-lazuli scarcely glittered on the opposite wall. This parlor, which could be gorgeous on a fine day, was usually, under the Flemish skies, filled with soft shadows and melancholy russet tones, like those shed by the sun on the tree-tops of the forests in autumn.

It is unnecessary to continue this description of the House of Claës, in other parts of which many scenes of this history will occur: at present, it is enough to make known its general arrangement.

II.

Towards the end of August, 1812, on a Sunday evening after vespers, a woman was sitting in a deep armchair placed before one of the windows looking out upon the garden. The sun's rays fell obliquely upon the house and athwart the parlor, breaking into fantastic lights on the carved panellings of the wall, and wrapping the woman in a crimson halo projected through the damask curtains which draped the window. Even an ordinary painter, had he sketched this woman at this particular moment, would assuredly have produced a striking picture of a head that was full of pain and melancholy. The attitude of the body, and that of the feet stretched out before her, showed the prostration of one who loses consciousness of physical being in the concentration of powers absorbed in a fixed idea: she was following its gleams in the far future, just as sometimes on the shores of the sea, we gaze at a ray of sunlight which pierces the clouds and draws a luminous line to the horizon.

The hands of this woman hung nerveless outside the arms of her chair, and her head, as if too heavy to hold up, lay back upon its cushions. A dress of white cambric, very full and flowing, hindered any judgment as to the proportions of her figure, and the bust was concealed by the folds of a scarf crossed on the bosom and negligently knotted. If the light had not thrown into relief her face, which she seemed to show in preference to the rest of her person, it would still have been impossible to escape riveting the attention exclusively upon it. Its expression of stupefaction, which was cold and rigid despite hot tears that were rolling from her eyes, would have struck the most thoughtless mind. Nothing is more terrible to behold than excessive grief that is rarely allowed to break forth, of which traces were left on this woman's face like lava congealed about a crater. She might have been a dying mother compelled to leave her children in abysmal depths of wretchedness, unable to bequeath them to any human protector.

The countenance of this lady, then about forty years of age and not nearly so far from handsome as she had been in her youth, bore none of the characteristics of a Flemish woman. Her thick black hair fell in heavy curls upon her shoulders and about her cheeks. The forehead, very prominent, and narrow at the temples, was yellow in tint, but beneath it sparkled two black eyes that were capable of emitting flames. Her face, altogether Spanish, dark skinned, with little color and pitted by the small-pox, attracted the eye by the beauty of its oval, whose outline, though slightly impaired by time, preserved a finished elegance and dignity, and regained at times its full perfection when some effort of the soul restored its pristine purity. The most noticeable feature in this strong face was the nose, aquiline as the beak of an eagle, and so sharply curved at the middle as to give the idea of an interior malformation; yet there was an air of indescribable delicacy about it, and the partition between the nostrils was so thin that a rosy light shone through it. Though the lips, which were large and curved, betrayed the pride of noble birth, their expression was one of kindliness and natural courtesy.

The beauty of this vigorous yet feminine face might indeed be questioned, but the face itself commanded attention. Short, deformed, and lame, this woman remained all the longer unmarried because the world obstinately refused to credit her with gifts of mind. Yet there were men who were deeply stirred by the passionate ardor of that face and its tokens of ineffable tenderness, and who remained under a charm that was seemingly irreconcilable with such personal defects.

She was very like her grandfather, the Duke of Casa-Réal, a grandee of Spain. At this moment, when we first see her, the charm which in earlier days despotically grasped the soul of poets and lovers of poesy now emanated from that head with greater vigor than at any former period of her life, spending itself, as it were, upon the void, and expressing a nature of all-powerful fascination over men, though it was at the same time powerless over destiny.

When her eyes turned from the glass globes, where they were gazing at the fish they saw not, she raised them with a despairing action, as if to invoke the skies. Her sufferings seemed of a kind that are told to God alone. The silence was unbroken save for the chirp of crickets and the shrill whirr of a few locusts, coming from the little garden then hotter than an oven, and the dull sound of silver and plates, and the moving of chairs in the adjoining room, where a servant was preparing to serve the dinner.

At this moment, the distressed woman roused herself from her abstraction and listened attentively; she took her handkerchief, wiped away her tears, attempted to smile, and so resolutely effaced the expression of pain that was stamped on every feature that she presently seemed in the state of happy indifference which comes with a life exempt from care. Whether it were that the habit of living in this house to which infirmities confined her enabled her to perceive certain natural effects that are imperceptible to the senses of others, but which persons under the influence of excessive feeling are keen to discover, or whether Nature, in compensation for her physical defects, had given her more delicate sensations than better organized beings, — it is certain that this woman had heard the steps of a man in a gallery built above the kitchens and the servants' hall, by which the front house communicated with the "back-quarter." The steps grew more distinct. Soon, without possessing the power of this ardent creature to abolish space and meet her other self, even a stranger would have heard the foot-fall of a man upon the staircase which led down from the gallery to the parlor.

The sound of that step would have startled the most heedless being into thought; it was impossible to hear it coolly. A precipitate, headlong step produces fear. When a man springs forward and cries, "Fire!" his feet speak as loudly as his voice. If this be so, then a contrary gait ought not to cause less powerful emotion. The slow approach, the dragging step of the coming man might have irritated an unreflecting spectator; but an observer, or a nervous person, would undoubtedly have felt something akin to terror at the measured tread of feet that seemed devoid of life, and under which the stairs creaked loudly, as though two iron weights were striking them alternately. The mind recognized at once either the heavy, undecided step of an old man or the majestic tread of a great thinker bearing the worlds with him.

When the man had reached the lowest stair, and had planted both feet upon the tiled floor with a hesitating, uncertain movement, he stood still for a moment on the wide landing which led on one side to the servants' hall, and on the other to the parlor through a door concealed in the panelling of that room, — as was another door, leading from the parlor to the dining-room. At this moment a slight shudder, like the sensation caused by an electric spark, shook the woman seated in the arm-chair; then a soft smile brightened her lips, and her face, moved by the expectation of a pleasure, shone like that of an Italian Madonna. She suddenly gained strength to drive her terrors back into the depths of her heart. Then she turned her face to the panel of the wall which she knew was about to open, and which in fact was now pushed in with such brusque violence that the poor woman herself seemed jarred by the shock.

Balthazar Claës suddenly appeared, made a few steps forward, did not look at the woman, or if he looked at her did not see her, and stood erect in the middle of the parlor, leaning his half-bowed head on his right hand. A sharp pang to which the woman could not accustom herself, although it was daily renewed, wrung her heart, dispelled her smile, contracted the sallow forehead between the eyebrows, indenting that line which the frequent expression of excessive feeling scores so deeply; her eyes filled with tears, but she wiped them quickly as she looked at Balthazar.

It was impossible not to be deeply impressed by this head of the family of Claës. When young, he must have resembled the noble family martyr who had threatened to be another Artevelde to Charles V.; but as he stood there at this moment, he seemed over sixty years of age, though he was only fifty; and this premature old age had destroyed the honorable likeness. His tall figure was slightly bent, — either because his labors, whatever they were, obliged him to stoop, or that the spinal column was curved by the weight of his head. He had a broad chest and square shoulders, but the lower parts of the body were lank and wasted, though nervous; and this discrepancy in a physical organization evidently once perfect puzzled the mind which endeavored to explain this anomalous figure by some possible singularities of the man's life.

His thick blond hair, ill cared-for, fell over his shoulders in the Dutch fashion, and its very disorder was in keeping with the general eccentricity of his person. His broad brow showed certain protuberances which Gall identifies with poetic genius. His clear and full blue eyes had the brusque vivacity which may be noticed in searchers for occult causes. The nose, probably perfect in early life, was now elongated, and the nostrils seemed to have gradually opened wider from an involuntary tension of the olfactory muscles. The cheek-bones were very prominent, which made the cheeks themselves, already withered, seem more sunken; his mouth, full of sweetness, was squeezed in between the nose and a short chin, which projected sharply. The shape of the face, however, was long rather than oval, and the scientific doctrine which sees in every human face a likeness to an animal would have found its confirmation in that of Balthazar Claës, which bore a strong resemblance to a horse's head. The skin clung closely to the bones, as though some inward fire were incessantly drying its juices. Sometimes, when he gazed into space, as if to see the realization of his hopes, it almost seemed as though the flames that devoured his soul were issuing from his nostrils.

The inspired feelings that animate great men shone forth on the pale face furrowed with wrinkles, on the brow haggard with care like that of an old monarch, but above all they gleamed in the sparkling eye, whose fires were fed by chastity imposed by the tyranny of ideas and by the inward consecration of a great intellect. The cavernous eyes seemed to have sunk in their orbits through midnight vigils and the terrible reaction of hopes destroyed, yet ceaselessly reborn. The zealous fanaticism inspired by an art or a science was evident in this man; it betrayed itself in the strange, persistent abstraction of his mind expressed by his dress and bearing, which were in keeping with the anomalous peculiarities of his person.

His large, hairy hands were dirty, and the nails, which were very long, had deep black lines at their extremities. His shoes were not cleaned and the shoestrings were missing. Of all that Flemish household, the master alone took the strange liberty of being slovenly. His black cloth trousers were covered with stains, his waistcoat was unbuttoned, his cravat awry, his greenish coat ripped at the seams, — completing an array of signs, great and small, which in any other man would have betokened a poverty begotten of vice, but which in Balthazar Claës was the negligence of genius.

Vice and Genius too often produce the same effects; and this misleads the common mind. What is genius but a long excess which squanders time and wealth and physical powers, and leads more rapidly to a hospital than the worst of passions? Men even seem to have more respect for vices than for genius, since to the latter they refuse credit. The profits accruing from the hidden labors of the brain are so remote that the social world fears to square accounts with the man of learning in his lifetime, preferring to get rid of its obligations by not forgiving his misfortunes or his poverty.

If, in spite of this inveterate forgetfulness of the present, Balthazar Claës had abandoned his mysterious abstractions, if some sweet and companionable meaning had revisited that thoughtful countenance, if the fixed eyes had lost their rigid strain and shone with feeling, if he had ever looked humanly about him and returned to the real life of common things, it would indeed have been difficult not to do involuntary homage to the winning beauty of his face and the gracious soul that would then have shone from it. As it was, all who looked at him regretted that the man belonged no more to the world at large, and said to one another: "He must have been very handsome in his youth." A vulgar error! Never was Balthazar Claës's appearance more poetic than at this moment. Lavater, had he seen him, would fain have studied that head so full of patience, of Flemish loyalty, and pure morality, — where all was broad and noble, and passion seemed calm because it was strong.

The conduct of this man could not be otherwise than pure; his word was sacred, his friendships seemed undeviating, his self-devotedness complete: and yet the will to employ those qualities in patriotic service, for the world or for the family, was directed, fatally, elsewhere. This citizen, bound to guard the welfare of a household, to manage property, to guide his children towards a noble future, was living outside the line of his duty and his affections, in communion with an attendant spirit. A priest might have thought him inspired by the word of God; an artist would have hailed him as a great master; an enthusiast would have taken him for a seer of the Swedenborgian faith.

At the present moment, the dilapidated, uncouth, and ruined clothes that he wore contrasted strangely with the graceful elegance of the woman who was sadly admiring him. Deformed persons who have intellect, or nobility of soul, show an exquisite taste in their apparel. Either they dress simply, convinced that their charm is wholly moral, or they make others forget their imperfections by an elegance of detail which diverts the eye and occupies the mind. Not only did this woman possess a noble soul, but she loved Balthazar Claës with that instinct of the woman which gives a foretaste of the communion of angels. Brought up in one of the most illustrious families of Belgium, she would have learned good taste had she not possessed it; and now, taught by the desire of constantly pleasing the man she loved, she knew how to clothe herself admirably, and without producing incongruity between her elegance and the defects of her conformation. The bust, however, was defective in the shoulders only, one of which was noticeably much larger than the other.

She looked out of the window into the court-yard, then towards the garden, as if to make sure she was alone with Balthazar, and presently said, in a gentle voice and with a look full of a Flemish woman's submissiveness, — for between these two love had long since driven out the pride of her Spanish nature: —

"Balthazar, are you so very busy? this is the thirty-third Sunday since you have been to mass or vespers."

Claës did not answer; his wife bowed her head, clasped her hands, and waited: she knew that his silence meant neither contempt nor indifference, only a tyrannous preoccupation. Balthazar was one of those beings who preserve deep in their souls and after long years all their youthful delicacy of feeling; he would have thought it criminal to wound by so much as a word a woman weighed down by the sense of physical disfigurement. No man knew better than he that a look, a word, suffices to blot out years of happiness, and is the more cruel because it contrasts with the unfailing tenderness of the past: our nature leads us to suffer more from one discord in our happiness than pleasure coming in the midst of trouble can bring us joy.

Presently Balthazar appeared to waken; he looked quickly about him, and said, —

"Vespers? Ah, yes! the children are at vespers."

He made a few steps forward, and looked into the garden, where magnificent tulips were growing on all sides; then he suddenly stopped short as if brought up against a wall, and cried out, —

"Why should they not combine within a given time?"

"Is he going mad?" thought the wife, much terrified.

To give greater interest to the present scene, which was called forth by the situation of their affairs, it is absolutely necessary to glance back at the past lives of Balthazar Claës and the granddaughter of the Duke of Casa-Réal.

Towards the year 1783, Monsieur Balthazar Claës-Molina de Nourho, then twenty-two years of age, was what is called in France a fine man. He came to finish his education in Paris, where he acquired excellent manners in the society of Madame d'Egmont, Count Horn, the Prince of Aremberg, the Spanish ambassador, Helvetius, and other Frenchmen originally from Belgium, or coming lately thence, whose birth or wealth won them admittance among the great seigneurs who at that time gave the tone to social life. Young Claës found several relations and friends ready to launch him into the great world at the very moment when that world was about to fall. Like other young men, he was at first more attracted by glory and science than by the vanities of life. He frequented the society of scientific men, particularly Lavoisier, who at that time was better known to the world for his enormous fortune as a *fermier-général* than for his discoveries in chemistry, — though later the great chemist was to eclipse the man of wealth.

Balthazar grew enamoured of the science which Lavoisier cultivated, and became his devoted disciple;

but he was young, and handsome as Helvetius, and before long the Parisian women taught him to distil wit and love exclusively. Though he had studied chemistry with such ardor that Lavoisier commended him, he deserted science and his master for those mistresses of fashion and good taste from whom young men take finishing lessons in knowledge of life, and learn the usages of good society, which in Europe forms, as it were, one family.

The intoxicating dream of social success lasted but a short time. Balthazar left Paris, weary of a hollow existence which suited neither his ardent soul nor his loving heart. Domestic life, so calm, so tender, which the very name of Flanders recalled to him, seemed far more fitted to his character and to the aspirations of his heart. No gilded Parisian salon had effaced from his mind the harmonies of the panelled parlor and the little garden where his happy childhood had slipped away. A man must needs be without a home to remain in Paris, — Paris, the city of cosmopolitans, of men who wed the world, and clasp her with the arms of Science, Art, or Power.

The son of Flanders came back to Douai, like La Fontaine's pigeon to its nest; he wept with joy as he re-entered the town on the day of the Gayant procession, — Gayant, the superstitious luck of Douai, the glory of Flemish traditions, introduced there at the time the Claës family had emigrated from Ghent. The death of Balthazar's father and mother had left the old mansion deserted, and the young man was occupied for a time in settling its affairs. His first grief over, he wished to marry; he needed the domestic happiness whose every religious aspect had fastened upon his mind. He even followed the family custom of seeking a wife in Ghent, or at Bruges, or Antwerp; but it happened that no woman whom he met there suited him. Undoubtedly, he had certain peculiar ideas as to marriage; from his youth he had been accused of never following the beaten track.

One day, at the house of a relation in Ghent, he heard a young lady, then living in Brussels, spoken of in a manner which gave rise to a long discussion. Some said that the beauty of Mademoiselle de Temninck was destroyed by the imperfections of her figure; others declared that she was perfect in spite of her defects. Balthazar's old cousin, at whose house the discussion took place, assured his guests that, handsome or not, she had a soul that would make him marry her were he a marrying man; and he told how she had lately renounced her share of her parents' property to enable her brother to make a marriage worthy of his name; thus preferring his happiness to her own, and sacrificing her future to his interests, — for it was not to be supposed that Mademoiselle de Temninck would marry late in life and without property when, young and wealthy, she had met with no aspirant.

A few days later, Balthazar Claës made the acquaintance of Mademoiselle de Temninck; with whom he fell deeply in love. At first, Joséphine de Temninck thought herself the object of a mere caprice, and refused to listen to Monsieur Claës; but passion is contagious; and to a poor girl who was lame and ill-made, the sense of inspiring love in a young and handsome man carries with it such strong seduction that she finally consented to allow him to woo her.

It would need a volume to paint the love of a young girl humbly submissive to the verdict of a world that calls her plain, while she feels within her the irresistible charm which comes of sensibility and true feeling. It involves fierce jealousy of happiness, freaks of cruel vengeance against some fancied rival who wins a glance, — emotions, terrors, unknown to the majority of women, and which ought, therefore, to be more than indicated. The doubt, the dramatic doubt of love, is the keynote of this analysis, where certain souls will find once more the lost, but unforgotten, poetry of their early struggles; the passionate exaltations of the heart which the face must not betray; the fear that we may not be understood, and the boundless joy of being so; the hesitations of the soul which recoils upon itself, and the magnetic propulsions which give to the eyes an infinitude of shades; the promptings to suicide caused by a word, dispelled by an intonation; trembling glances which veil an inward daring; sudden desires to speak and act that are paralyzed by their own violence; the secret eloquence of common phrases spoken in a quivering voice; the mysterious workings of that pristine modesty of soul and that divine discernment which lead to hidden generosities, and give so exquisite a flavor to silent devotion; in short, all the loveliness of young love, and the weaknesses of its power.

Mademoiselle Joséphine de Temninck was coquettish from nobility of soul. The sense of her obvious imperfections made her as difficult to win as the handsomest of women. The fear of some day displeasing the eye roused her pride, destroyed her trustfulness, and gave her the courage to hide in the depths of her heart that dawning happiness which other women delight in making known by their manners, — wearing it proudly, like a coronet. The more love urged her towards Balthazar, the less she dared to express her feelings. The glance, the gesture, the question and answer as it were of a pretty woman, so flattering to the man she loves, would they not be in her case mere humiliating speculation? A beautiful woman can be her natural self, — the world overlooks her little follies or her clumsiness; whereas a single criticising glance checks the noblest expression on the lips of an ugly woman, adds to the ill-grace of her gesture, gives timidity to her eyes and awkwardness to her whole bearing. She knows too well that to her alone the world condones no faults; she is denied the right to repair them; indeed, the chance to do so is never given. This necessity of being perfect and on her guard at every moment, must surely chill her faculties and numb their exercise? Such a woman can exist only in an atmosphere of angelic forbearance. Where are the hearts from which forbearance comes with no alloy of bitter and stinging pity?

These thoughts, to which the codes of social life had accustomed her, and the sort of consideration more wounding than insult shown to her by the world, — a consideration which increases a misfortune by making it apparent, — oppressed Mademoiselle de Temninck with a constant sense of embarrassment, which drove back into her soul its happiest expression, and chilled and stiffened her attitudes, her speech, her looks. Loving and beloved, she dared to be eloquent or beautiful only when alone. Unhappy and oppressed in the broad daylight of life, she might have been enchanting could she have expanded in the shadow. Often, to test the love thus offered to her, and at the risk of losing it, she refused to wear the draperies that concealed some portion of her defects, and her Spanish eyes grew entrancing when they saw that Balthazar thought her beautiful as before.

Nevertheless, even so, distrust spoiled the rare moments when she yielded herself to happiness. She asked herself if Claës were not seeking a domestic slave, — one who would necessarily keep the house? whether he had himself no secret imperfection which obliged him to be satisfied with a poor, deformed girl? Such perpetual misgivings gave a priceless value to the few short hours during which she trusted the sincerity and the permanence of a love which was to avenge her on the world. Sometimes she provoked hazardous discussions, and probed the inner consciousness of her lover by exaggerating her defects. At such times she often wrung from Balthazar truths that were far from flattering; but she loved the embarrassment into which he fell when she had led him to say that what he loved in a woman was a noble soul and the devotion which made each day of life a constant happiness; and that after a few years of married life the handsomest of women was no more to a husband than the ugliest. After gathering up what there was of truth in all such paradoxes tending to reduce the value of beauty, Balthazar would suddenly perceive the ungraciousness of his remarks, and show the goodness of his heart by the delicate transitions of thought with which he proved to Mademoiselle de Temninck that she was perfect in his eyes.

The spirit of devotion which, it may be, is the crown of love in a woman, was not lacking in this young girl, who had always despaired of being loved; at first, the prospect of a struggle in which feeling and sentiment would triumph over actual beauty tempted her; then, she fancied a grandeur in giving herself to a man in whose love she did not believe; finally, she was forced to admit that happiness, however short its duration might be, was too precious to resign.

Such hesitations, such struggles, giving the charm and the unexpectedness of passion to this noble creature, inspired Balthazar with a love that was well-nigh chivalric.

III.

The marriage took place at the beginning of the year 1795. Husband and wife came to Douai that the first days of their union might be spent in the patriarchal house of the Claës, — the treasures of which were increased by those of Mademoiselle de Temninck, who brought with her several fine pictures of Murillo and Velasquez, the diamonds of her mother, and the magnificent wedding-gifts, made to her by her brother, the Duke of Casa-Réal.

Few women were ever happier than Madame Claës. Her happiness lasted for fifteen years without a cloud, diffusing itself like a vivid light into every nook and detail of her life. Most men have inequalities of character which produce discord, and deprive their households of the harmony which is the ideal of a home; the majority are blemished with some littleness or meanness, and meanness of any kind begets bickering. One man is honorable and diligent, but hard and crabbed; another kindly, but obstinate; this one loves his wife, yet his will is arbitrary and uncertain; that other, preoccupied by ambition, pays off his affections as he would a debt, bestows the luxuries of wealth but deprives the daily life of happiness, — in short, the average man of social life is essentially incomplete, without being signally to blame. Men of talent are as variable as barometers; genius alone is intrinsically good.

For this reason unalloyed happiness is found at the two extremes of the moral scale. The good-natured fool and the man of genius alone are capable — the one through weakness, the other by strength — of that equanimity of temper, that unvarying gentleness, which soften the asperities of daily life. In the one, it is indifference or stolidity; in the other, indulgence and a portion of the divine thought of which he is the interpreter, and which needs to be consistent alike in principle and application. Both natures are equally simple; but in one there is vacancy, in the other depth. This is why clever women are disposed to take dull men as the small change for great ones.

Balthazar Claës carried his greatness into the lesser things of life. He delighted in considering conjugal love as a magnificent work; and like all men of lofty aims who can bear nothing imperfect, he wished to develop all its beauties. His powers of mind enlivened the calm of happiness, his noble nature marked his attentions with the charm of grace. Though he shared the philosophical tenets of the eighteenth century, he installed a chaplain in his home until 1801 (in spite of the risk he ran from the revolutionary decrees), so that he might not thwart the Spanish fanaticism which his wife had sucked in with her mother's milk: later, when public worship was restored in France, he accompanied her to mass every Sunday. His passion never ceased to be that of a lover. The protecting power, which women like so much, was never exercised by this husband, lest to that wife it might seem pity. He treated her with exquisite flattery as an equal, and sometimes mutinied against her, as men will, as though to brave the supremacy of a pretty woman. His lips wore a smile of happiness, his speech was ever tender; he loved his Joséphine for herself and for himself, with an ardor that crowned with perpetual praise the qualities and the loveliness of a wife.

Fidelity, often the result of social principle, religious duty, or self-interest on the part of a husband, was in this case involuntary, and not without the sweet flatteries of the spring-time of love. Duty was the only marriage obligation unknown to these lovers, whose love was equal; for Balthazar Claës found the complete and lasting realization of his hopes in Mademoiselle de Temninck; his heart was satisfied but not wearied, the man within him was ever happy.

Not only did the daughter of Casa-Réal derive from her Spanish blood the intuition of that science which varies pleasure and makes it infinite, but she possessed the spirit of unbounded self-devotion, which is the genius of her sex as grace is that of beauty. Her love was a blind fanaticism which, at a nod, would have sent her joyously to her death. Balthazar's own delicacy had exalted the generous emotions of his wife, and inspired her with an imperious need of giving more than she received. This mutual exchange of happiness which each lavished upon the other, put the mainspring of her life visibly outside of her personality, and filled her words, her looks, her actions, with an ever-growing love. Gratitude fertilized and varied the life of each heart; and the certainty of being all in all to one another excluded the paltry things of existence, while it magnified the smallest accessories.

The deformed woman whom her husband thinks straight, the lame woman whom he would not have otherwise, the old woman who seems ever young — are they not the happiest creatures of the feminine world? Can human passion go beyond it? The glory of a woman is to be adored for a defect. To forget that a lame woman does not walk straight may be the glamour of a moment, but to love her because she is lame is the deification of her defects. In the gospel of womanhood it is written: "Blessed are the imperfect, for theirs is the kingdom of Love." If this be so, surely beauty is a misfortune; that fugitive flower counts for too much in the feeling that a woman inspires; often she is loved for her beauty as another is married for her money. But the love inspired or bestowed by a woman disinherited of the frail advantages pursued by the sons of Adam, is true love, the mysterious passion, the ardent embrace of souls, a sentiment for which the day of disenchantment never comes. That woman has charms unknown to the world, from whose jurisdiction she withdraws herself: she is beautiful with a meaning; her glory lies in making her imperfections forgotten, and thus she constantly succeeds in doing so.

The celebrated attachments of history were nearly all inspired by women in whom the vulgar mind would have found defects, — Cleopatra, Jeanne de Naples, Diane de Poitiers, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, Madame de Pompadour; in fact, the majority of the women whom love has rendered famous were not without infirmities and imperfections, while the greater number of those whose beauty is cited as perfect came to some tragic end of love.

This apparent singularity must have a cause. It may be that man lives more by sentiment than by sense; perhaps the physical charm of beauty is limited, while the moral charm of a woman without beauty is infinite. Is not this the moral of the fable on which the Arabian Nights are based? An ugly wife of Henry VIII. might have defied the axe, and subdued to herself the inconstancy of her master.

By a strange chance, not inexplicable, however, in a girl of Spanish origin, Madame Claës was uneducated. She knew how to read and write, but up to the age of twenty, at which time her parents withdrew her from a convent, she had read none but ascetic books. On her first entrance into the world, she was eager for pleasure and learned only the flimsy art of dress; she was, moreover, so deeply conscious of her ignorance that she dared not join in conversation; for which reason she was supposed to have little mind. Yet, the mystical education of a convent had one good result; it left her feelings in full force and her natural powers of mind uninjured. Stupid and plain as an heiress in the eyes of the world, she became intellectual and beautiful to her husband. During the first years of their married life, Balthazar endeavored to give her at least the knowledge that she needed to appear to advantage in good society: but he was doubtless too late, she had no memory but that of the heart. Joséphine never forgot anything that Claës told her relating to themselves; she remembered the most trifling circumstances of their happy life; but of her evening studies nothing remained to her on the morrow.

This ignorance might have caused much discord between husband and wife, but Madame Claës's understanding of the passion of love was so simple and ingenuous, she loved her husband so religiously, so sacredly, and the thought of preserving her happiness made her so adroit, that she managed always to seem to understand him, and it was seldom indeed that her ignorance was evident. Moreover, when two persons love one another so well that each day seems for them the beginning of their passion, phenomena arise out of this teeming happiness which change all the conditions of life. It resembles childhood, careless of all that is not laughter, joy, and merriment. Then, when life is in full activity, when its hearths glow, man lets the fire burn without thought or discussion, without considering either the means or the end.

No daughter of Eve ever more truly understood the calling of a wife than Madame Claës. She had all the submission of a Flemish woman, but her Spanish pride gave it a higher flavor. Her bearing was imposing; she knew how to command respect by a look which expressed her sense of birth and dignity: but she trembled before Claës; she held him so high, so near to God, carrying to him every act of her life, every thought of her heart, that her love was not without a certain respectful fear which made it keener. She proudly assumed all the habits of a Flemish bourgeoise, and put her self-love into making the home life liberally happy, — preserving every detail of the house in scrupulous cleanliness, possessing nothing that did not serve the purposes of true comfort, supplying her table with the choicest food, and putting everything within those walls into harmony with the life of her heart.

The pair had two sons and two daughters. The eldest, Marguerite, was born in 1796. The last child was a boy, now three years old, named Jean-Balthazar. The maternal sentiment in Madame Claës was almost equal to her love for her husband; and there rose in her soul, especially during the last days of her life, a terrible struggle between those nearly balanced feelings, of which the one became, as it were, an enemy of the other. The tears and the terror that marked her face at the moment when this tale of a domestic drama then lowering over the quiet house begins, were caused by the fear of having sacrificed her children to her husband.

In 1805, Madame Claës's brother died without children. The Spanish law does not allow a sister to succeed to territorial possessions, which follow the title; but the duke had left her in his will about sixty thousand ducats, and this sum the heirs of the collateral branch did not seek to retain. Though the feeling which united her to Balthazar Claës was such that no thought of personal interest could ever sully it, Joséphine felt a certain pleasure in possessing a fortune equal to that of her husband, and was happy in giving something to one who had so nobly given everything to her. Thus, a mere chance turned a marriage which worldly minds had declared foolish, into an excellent alliance, seen from the standpoint of material interests. The use to which this sum of money should be put became, however, somewhat difficult to determine.

The House of Claës was so richly supplied with furniture, pictures, and objects of art of priceless value, that it was difficult to add anything worthy of what was already there. The tastes of the family through long periods of time had accumulated these treasures. One generation followed the quest of noble pictures, leaving behind it the necessity of completing a collection still unfinished; and thus the taste became hereditary in the family. The hundred pictures which adorned the gallery leading from the family building to the reception-rooms on the first floor of the front house, as well as some fifty others placed about the salons, were the product of the patient researches of three centuries. Among them were choice specimens of Rubens, Ruysdael, Vandyke, Terburg, Gerard Dow, Teniers, Mieris, Paul Potter, Wouvermans, Rembrandt, Hobbema, Cranach, and Holbein. French and Italian pictures were in a minority, but all were authentic and masterly.

Another generation had fancied Chinese and Japanese porcelains: this Claës was eager after rare furniture, that one for silver-ware; in fact, each and all had their mania, their passion, — a trait which belongs in a striking degree to the Flemish character. The father of Balthazar, a last relic of the once famous Dutch society, left behind him the finest known collection of tulips.

Besides these hereditary riches, which represented an enormous capital, and were the choice ornament of the venerable house, — a house that was simple as a shell outside but, like a shell, adorned within by pearls of price and glowing with rich color, — Balthazar Claës possessed a country-house on the plain of Orchies, not far from Douai. Instead of basing his expenses, as Frenchmen do, upon his revenues, he followed the old Dutch custom of spending only a fourth of his income. Twelve hundred ducats a year put his costs of living at a level with those of the richest men of the place. The promulgation of the Civil Code proved the wisdom of this course. Compelling, as it did, the equal division of property, the Title of Succession would some day leave each child with limited means, and disperse the treasures of the Claës collection. Balthazar, therefore, in concert with Madame Claës, invested his wife's property so as to secure to each child a fortune eventually equal to his own. The house of Claës still maintained its moderate scale of living, and bought woodlands somewhat the worse for the wars that had laid waste the country, but which in ten years' time, if well-preserved, would return an enormous value.

The upper ranks of society in Douai, which Monsieur Claës frequented, appreciated so justly the noble character and qualities of his wife that, by tacit consent she was released from those social duties to which the provinces cling so tenaciously. During the winter season, when she lived in town, she seldom went into society; society came to her. She received every Wednesday, and gave three grand dinners every month. Her friends felt that she was more at ease in her own house; where, indeed, her passion for her husband and the care she bestowed on the education of her children tended to keep her.

Such had been, up to the year 1809, the general course of this household, which had nothing in common with the ordinary run of conventional ideas, though the outward life of these two persons, secretly full of love and joy, was like that of other people. Balthazar Claës's passion for his wife, which she had known how to perpetuate, seemed, to use his own expression, to spend its inborn vigor and fidelity on the cultivation of happiness, which was far better than the cultivation of tulips (though to that he had always had a leaning), and dispensed him from the duty of following a mania like his ancestors.

At the close of this year, the mind and the manners of Balthazar Claës underwent a fatal change, — a change which began so gradually that at first Madame

Claës did not think it necessary to inquire the cause. One night her husband went to bed with a mind so preoccupied that she felt it incumbent on her to respect his mood. Her womanly delicacy and her submissive habits always led her to wait for Balthazar's confidence; which, indeed, was assured to her by so constant an affection that she had never had the slightest opening for jealousy. Though certain of obtaining an answer whenever she should make the inquiry, she still retained enough of the earlier impressions of her life to dread a refusal. Besides, the moral malady of her husband had its phases, and only came by slow degrees to the intolerable point at which it destroyed the happiness of the family.

However occupied Balthazar Claës might be, he continued for several months cheerful, affectionate, and ready to talk; the change in his character showed itself only by frequent periods of absent-mindedness. Madame Claës long hoped to hear from her husband himself the nature of the secret employment in which he was engaged; perhaps, she thought, he would reveal it when it developed some useful result; many men are led by pride to conceal the nature of their efforts, and only make them known at the moment of success. When the day of triumph came, surely domestic happiness would return, more vivid than ever when Balthazar became aware of this chasm in the life of love, which his heart would surely disavow. Joséphine knew her husband well enough to be certain that he would never forgive himself for having made his Pépita less than happy during several months.

She kept silence therefore, and felt a sort of joy in thus suffering by him for him: her passion had a tinge of that Spanish piety which allows no separation between religion and love, and believes in no sentiment without suffering. She waited for the return of her husband's affection, saying daily to herself, "To-morrow it may come," — treating her happiness as though it were an absent friend.

During this stage of her secret distress, she conceived her last child. Horrible crisis, which revealed a future of anguish! In the midst of her husband's abstractions love showed itself on this occasion an abstraction even greater than the rest. Her woman's pride, hurt for the first time, made her sound the depths of the unknown abyss which separated her from the Claës of earlier days. From that time Balthazar's condition grew rapidly worse. The man formerly so wrapped up in his domestic happiness, who played for hours with his children on the parlor carpet or round the garden paths, who seemed able to exist only in the light of his Pépita's dark eyes, did not even perceive her pregnancy, seldom shared the family life, and even forgot his own.

The longer Madame Claës postponed inquiring into the cause of his preoccupation the less she dared to do so. At the very idea, her blood ran cold and her voice grew faint. At last the thought occurred to her that she had ceased to please her husband, and then indeed she was seriously alarmed. That fear now filled her mind, drove her to despair, then to feverish excitement, and became the text of many an hour of melancholy revery. She defended Balthazar at her own expense, calling herself old and ugly; then she imagined a generous though humiliating consideration for her in this secret occupation by which he secured to her a negative fidelity; and she resolved to give him back his independence by allowing one of those unspoken divorces which make the happiness of many a marriage.

Before bidding farewell to conjugal life, Madame Claës made some attempt to read her husband's heart, and found it closed. Little by little, she saw him become indifferent to all that he had formerly loved; he neglected his tulips, he cared no longer for his children. There could be no doubt that he was given over to some passion that was not of the heart, but which, to a woman's mind, is not less withering. His love was dormant, not lost: this might be a consolation, but the misfortune remained the same.

The continuance of such a state of things is explained by one word, — hope, the secret of all conjugal situations. It so happened that whenever the poor woman reached a depth of despair which gave her courage to question her husband, she met with a few brief moments of happiness when she was able to feel that if Balthazar were indeed in the clutch of some devilish power, he was permitted, sometimes at least, to return to himself. At such moments, when her heaven brightened, she was too eager to enjoy its happiness to trouble him with importunate questions: later, when she endeavored to speak to him, he would suddenly escape, leave her abruptly, or drop into the gulf of meditation from which no word of hers could drag him.

Before long the reaction of the moral upon the physical condition began its ravages, — at first imperceptibly, except to the eyes of a loving woman following the secret thought of a husband through all its manifestations. Often she could scarcely restrain her tears when she saw him, after dinner, sink into an armchair by the corner of the fireplace, and remain there, gloomy and abstracted. She noted with terror the slow changes which deteriorated that face, once, to her eyes, sublime through love: the life of the soul was retreating from it; the structure remained, but the spirit was gone. Sometimes the eyes were glassy, and seemed as if they had turned their gaze and were looking inward. When the children had gone to bed, and the silence and solitude oppressed her, Pépita would say, "My friend, are you ill?" and Balthazar would make no answer; or if he answered, he would come to himself with a quiver, like a man snatched suddenly from sleep, and utter a "No" so harsh and grating that it fell like a stone on the palpitating heart of his wife.

Though she tried to hide this strange state of things from her friends, Madame Claës was obliged sometimes to allude to it. The social world of Douai, in accordance with the custom of provincial towns, had made Balthazar's aberrations a topic of conversation, and many persons were aware of certain details that were still unknown to Madame Claës. Disregarding the reticence which politeness demanded, a few friends expressed to her so much anxiety on the subject that she found herself compelled to defend her husband's peculiarities.

"Monsieur Claës," she said, "has undertaken a work which wholly absorbs him; its success will eventually redound not only to the honor of the family but to that of his country."

This mysterious explanation was too flattering to the ambition of a town whose local patriotism and desire for glory exceed those of other places, not to be readily accepted, and it produced on all minds a reaction in favor of Balthazar.

The supposition of his wife was, to a certain extent, well-founded. Several artificers of various trades had long been at work in the garret of the front house, where Balthazar went early every morning. After remaining, at first, for several hours, an absence to which his wife and household grew gradually accustomed, he ended by being there all day. But — unexpected shock! — Madame Claës learned through the humiliating medium of some women friends, who showed surprise at her ignorance, that her husband constantly imported instruments of physical science, valuable materials, books, machinery, etc., from Paris, and was on the highroad to ruin in search of the Philosophers' Stone. She ought, so her kind friends added, to think of her children, and her own future; it was criminal not to use her influence to draw Monsieur Claës from the fatal path on which he had entered.

Though Madame Claës, with the tone and manner of a great lady, silenced these absurd speeches, she was inwardly terrified in spite of her apparent confidence, and she resolved to break through her present system of silence and resignation. She brought about one of those little scenes in which husband and wife are on an equal footing; less timid at such a moment, she dared to ask Balthazar the reason for his change, the motive of his constant seclusion. The Flemish husband frowned, and replied: —

"My dear, you could not understand it."

Soon after, however, Joséphine insisted on being told the secret, gently complaining that she was not allowed to share all the thoughts of one whose life she shared.

"Very well, since it interests you so much," said Balthazar, taking his wife upon his knee and caressing her black hair, "I will tell you that I have returned to the study of chemistry, and I am the happiest man on earth."

IV.

Two years after the winter when Monsieur Claës returned to chemistry, the aspect of his house was changed. Whether it were that society was affronted by his perpetual absent-mindedness and chose to think itself in the way, or that Madame Claës's secret anxieties made her less agreeable than before, certain it is that she no longer saw any but her intimate friends. Balthazar went nowhere, shut himself up in his laboratory all day, sometimes stayed there all night, and only appeared in the bosom of his family at dinner-time.

After the second year he no longer passed the summer at his country-house, and his wife was unwilling to live there alone. Sometimes he went to walk and did not return till the following day, leaving Madame Claës a prey to mortal anxiety during the night. After causing a fruitless search for him through the town, whose gates, like those of other fortified places, were closed at night, it was impossible to send into the country, and the unhappy woman could only wait and suffer till morning. Balthazar, who had forgotten the hour at which the gates closed, would come tranquilly home the next day, quite unmindful of the tortures his absence had inflicted on his family; and the happiness of getting him back proved as dangerous an excitement of feeling to his wife as her fears of the preceding night. She kept silence and dared not question him, for when she did so on the occasion of his first absence, he answered with an air of surprise: —

"Well, what of it? Can I not take a walk?"

Passions never deceive. Madame Claës's anxieties corroborated the rumors she had taken so much pains to deny. The experience of her youth had taught her to understand the polite pity of the world. Resolved not to undergo it a second time, she withdrew more and more into the privacy of her own house, now deserted by society and even by her nearest friends.

Among these many causes of distress, the negligence and disorder of Balthazar's dress, so degrading to a man of his station, was not the least bitter to a woman accustomed to the exquisite nicety of Flemish life. At first Josephine endeavored, in concert with Balthazar's valet, Lemulquinier, to repair the daily devastation of his clothing, but even that she was soon forced to give up. The very day when Balthazar, unaware of the substitution, put on new clothes in place of those that were stained, torn, or full of holes, he made rags of them.

The poor wife, whose perfect happiness had lasted fifteen years, during which time her jealousy had never once been roused, was apparently and suddenly nothing in the heart where she had lately reigned. Spanish by race, the feelings of a Spanish woman rose within her when she discovered her rival in a Science that allured her husband from her: torments of jealousy preyed upon her heart and renewed her love. What could she do against Science? Should she combat that tyrannous, unyielding, growing power? Could she kill an invisible rival? Could a woman, limited by nature, contend with an Idea whose delights are infinite, whose attractions are ever new? How make head against the fascination of ideas that spring the fresher and the lovelier out of difficulty, and entice a man so far from this world that he forgets even his dearest loves?

At last one day, in spite of Balthazar's strict orders, Madame Claës resolved to follow him, to shut herself up in the garret where his life was spent, and struggle hand to hand against her rival by sharing her husband's labors during the long hours he gave to that terrible mistress. She determined to slip secretly into the mysterious laboratory of seduction, and obtain the right to be there always. Lemulquinier alone had that right, and she meant to share it with him; but to prevent his witnessing the contention with her husband which she feared at the outset, she waited for an opportunity when the valet should be out of the way. For a while she studied the goings and comings of the man with angry impatience; did he not know that which was denied to her — all that her husband hid from her, all that she dared not inquire into? Even a servant was preferred to a wife!

The day came; she approached the place, trembling, yet almost happy. For the first time in her life she encountered Balthazar's anger. She had hardly opened the door before he sprang upon her, seized her, threw her roughly on the staircase, so that she narrowly escaped rolling to the bottom.

"God be praised! you are still alive!" he cried, raising her.

A glass vessel had broken into fragments over Madame Claës, who saw her husband standing by her, pale, terrified, and almost livid.

"My dear, I forbade you to come here," he said, sitting down on the stairs, as though prostrated. "The saints have saved your life! By what chance was it that my eyes were on the door when you opened it? We have just escaped death."

"Then I might have been happy!" she exclaimed.

"My experiment has failed," continued Balthazar. "You alone could I forgive for that terrible disappointment. I was about to decompose nitrogen. Go back to your own affairs."

Balthazar re-entered the laboratory and closed the door.

"Decompose nitrogen!" said the poor woman as she re-entered her chamber, and burst into tears.

The phrase was unintelligible to her. Men, trained by education to have a general conception of everything, have no idea how distressing it is for a woman to be unable to comprehend the thought of the man she loves. More forbearing than we, these divine creatures do not let us know when the language of their souls is not understood by us; they shrink from letting us feel the superiority of their feelings, and hide their pain as gladly as they silence their wishes: but, having higher ambitions in love than men, they desire to wed not only the heart of a husband, but his mind.

To Madame Claës the sense of knowing nothing of a science which absorbed her husband filled her with a vexation as keen as the beauty of a rival might have caused. The struggle of woman against woman gives to her who loves the most the advantage of loving best; but a mortification like this only proved Madame Claës's powerlessness and humiliated the feelings by which she lived. She was ignorant; and she had reached a point where her ignorance parted her from her husband. Worse than all, last and keenest torture, he was risking his life, he was often in danger — near her, yet far away, and she might not share, nor even know, his peril. Her position became, like hell, a moral prison from which there was no issue, in which there was no hope. Madame Claës resolved to know at least the outward attractions of this fatal science, and she began secretly to study chemistry in the books. From this time the family became, as it were, cloistered.

Such were the successive changes brought by this dire misfortune upon the family of Claës, before it reached the species of atrophy in which we find it at the moment when this history begins.

The situation grew daily more complicated. Like all passionate women, Madame Claës was disinterested. Those who truly love know that considerations of money count for little in matters of feeling and are reluctantly associated with them. Nevertheless, Joséphine did not hear without distress that her husband had borrowed three hundred thousand francs upon his property. The apparent authenticity of the transaction, the rumors and conjectures spread through the town, forced Madame Claës, naturally much alarmed, to question her husband's notary and, disregarding her pride, to reveal to him her secret anxieties or let him guess them, and even ask her the humiliating question, —

"How is it that Monsieur Claës has not told you of this?"

Happily, the notary was almost a relation, — in this wise: The grandfather of Monsieur Claës had married a Pierquin of Antwerp, of the same family as the Pierquins of Douai. Since the marriage the latter, though strangers to the Claës, claimed them as cousins. Monsieur Pierquin, a young man twenty-six years of age, who had just succeeded to his father's practice, was the only person who now had access to the House of Claës.

Madame Balthazar had lived for several months in such complete solitude that the notary was obliged not only to confirm the rumor of the disasters, but to give her further particulars, which were now well known throughout the town. He told her it was probable that her husband owed considerable sums of money to the house which furnished him with chemicals. That house, after making inquiries as to the fortune and credit of Monsieur Claës, accepted all his orders and sent the supplies without hesitation, notwithstanding the heavy sums of money which became due. Madame Claës requested Pierquin to obtain the bill for all the chemicals that had been furnished to her husband.

Two months later, Messieurs Protez and Chiffreville, manufacturers of chemical products, sent in a schedule of accounts rendered, which amounted to over one hundred thousand francs. Madame Claës and Pierquin studied the document with an ever-increasing surprise. Though some articles, entered in commercial and scientific terms, were unintelligible to them, they were frightened to see entries of precious metals and diamonds of all kinds, though in small quantities. The large sum total of the debt was explained by the multiplicity of articles, by the precautions needed in transporting some of them, more especially valuable machinery, by the exorbitant price of certain rare chemicals, and finally by the cost of instruments made to order after the designs of Monsieur Claës himself.

The notary had made inquiries, in his client's interest, as to Messieurs Protez and Chiffreville, and found that their known integrity was sufficient guarantee as to the honesty of their operations with Monsieur Claës, to whom, moreover, they frequently sent information of results obtained by chemists in Paris, for the purpose of sparing him expense. Madame Claës begged the notary to keep the nature of these purchases from the knowledge of the people of Douai, lest they should declare the whole thing a mania; but Pierquin replied that he had already delayed to the very last moment the notarial deeds which the importance of the sum borrowed necessitated, in order not to lessen the respect in which Monsieur Claës was held. He then revealed the full extent of the evil, telling her plainly that if she could not find means to prevent her husband from thus madly making way with his property, in six months the patrimonial fortune of the Claës would be mortgaged to its full value. As for himself, he said, the remonstrances he had already made to his cousin, with all the consideration due to a man so justly respected, had been wholly unavailing. Balthazar had replied, once for all, that he was working for the fame and the fortune of his family.

Thus, to the tortures of the heart which Madame Claës had borne for two years — one following the other with cumulative suffering — was now added a dreadful and ceaseless fear which made the future terrifying. Women have presentiments whose accuracy is often marvellous. Why do they fear so much more than they hope in matters that concern the interests of this life? Why is their faith given only to religious ideas of a future existence? Why do they so ably foresee the catastrophes of fortune and the crises of fate? Perhaps the sentiment which unites them to the men they love gives them a sense by which they weigh force, measure faculties, understand tastes, passions, vices, virtues. The perpetual study of these causes in the midst of which they live gives them, no doubt, the fatal power of foreseeing effects in all possible relations of earthly life. What they see of the present enables them to judge of the future with an intuitive ability explained by the perfection of their nervous system, which allows them to seize the lightest indications of thought and feeling. Their whole being vibrates in communion with great moral convulsions. Either they feel, or they see.

Now, although separated from her husband for over two years, Madame Claës foresaw the loss of their property. She fully understood the deliberate ardor, the well-considered, inalterable steadfastness of Balthazar; if it were indeed true that he was seeking to make gold, he was capable of throwing his last crust into the crucible with absolute indifference. But what was he really seeking? Up to this time maternal feeling and conjugal love had been so mingled in the heart of this woman that the children, equally beloved by husband and wife, had never come between them. Suddenly she found herself at times more mother than wife, though hitherto she had been more wife than mother. However ready she had been to sacrifice her fortune and even her children to the man who had chosen her, loved her, adored her, and to whom she was still the only woman in the world, the remorse she felt for the weakness of her maternal love threw her into terrible alternations of feeling. As a wife, she suffered in heart; as a mother, through her children; as a Christian, for all.

She kept silence, and hid the cruel struggle in her soul. Her husband, sole arbiter of the family fate, was the master by whose will it must be guided; he was responsible to God only. Besides, could she reproach him for the use he now made of his fortune, after the disinterestedness he had shown to her for many happy years? Was she to judge his purposes? And yet her conscience, in keeping with the spirit of the law, told her that parents were the depositaries and guardians of property, and possessed no right to alienate the material welfare of the children. To escape replying to such stern questions she preferred to shut her eyes, like one who refuses to see the abyss into whose depths he knows he is about to fall.

For more than six months her husband had given her no money for the household expenses. She sold secretly, in Paris, the handsome diamond ornaments her brother had given her on her marriage, and placed the family on a footing of the strictest economy. She sent away the governess of her children, and even the nurse of little Jean. Formerly the luxury of carriages and horses was unknown among the burgher families, so simple were they in their habits, so proud in their feelings; no provision for that modern innovation had therefore been made at the House of Claës, and Balthazar was obliged to have his stable and coachhouse in a building opposite to his own house: his present occupations allowed him no time to superintend that portion of his establishment, which belongs exclusively to men. Madame Claës suppressed the whole expense of equipages and servants, which her present isolation from the world rendered unnecessary, and she did so without pretending to conceal the retrenchment under any pretext. So far, facts had contradicted her assertions, and silence for the future was more becoming: indeed the change in the family mode of living called for no explanation in a country where, as in Flanders, any one who lives up to his income is considered a madman.

And yet, as her eldest daughter, Marguerite, approached her sixteenth birthday, Madame Claës longed to procure for her a good marriage, and to place her in society in a manner suitable to a daughter of the Molinas, the Van Ostrom-Temnincks, and the Casa-Réals. A few days before the one on which this story opens, the money derived from the sale of the diamonds had been exhausted. On the very day, at three o'clock in the afternoon, as Madame Claës was taking her children to vespers, she met Pierquin, who was on his way to see her, and who turned and accompanied her to the church, talking in a low voice of her situation.

"My dear cousin," he said, "unless I fail in the friendship which binds me to your family, I cannot conceal from you the peril of your position, or refrain from begging you to speak to your husband. Who but you can hold him back from the gulf into which he is plunging? The rents from the mortgaged estates are not enough to pay the interest on the sums he has borrowed. If he cuts the wood on them he destroys your last chance of safety in the future. My cousin Balthazar owes at this moment thirty thousand francs to the house of Protez and Chiffreville. How can you pay them? What will you live on? If Claës persists in sending for reagents, retorts, voltaic batteries, and other such playthings, what will become of you? Your whole property, except the house and furniture, has been dissipated in gas and carbon; yesterday he talked of mortgaging the house, and in answer to a remark of mine, he cried out, 'The devil!' It was the first sign of reason I have known him show for three years."

Madame Claës pressed the notary's arm, and said in a tone of suffering, "Keep it secret."

Overwhelmed by these plain words of startling clearness, the poor woman, pious as she was, could not pray; she sat still on her chair between her children, with her prayer-book open, but not turning its leaves; her mind was sunk in meditations as absorbing as those of her husband. The Spanish sense of honor, the Flemish integrity, resounded in her soul with a peal louder than any organ. The ruin of her children was accomplished! Between them and their father's honor she must no longer hesitate. The necessity of a coming struggle with her husband terrified her; in her eyes he was so great, so majestic, that the mere prospect of his anger made her tremble as at a vision of the divine wrath. She must now depart from the submission she had sacredly practised as a wife. The interests of her children compelled her to oppose, in his most cherished tastes, the man she idolized. Must she not daily force him back to common matters from the higher realms of Science; drag him forcibly from a smiling future and plunge him into a materialism hideous to artists and great men? To her, Balthazar Claës was a Titan of science, a man big with glory; he could only have forgotten her for the riches of a mighty hope. Then too, was he not profoundly wise? she had heard him talk with such good sense on every subject that he must be sincere when he declared he worked for the glory and prosperity of his family. His love for his wife and family was not only vast, it was infinite. That feeling could not be extinct; it was magnified, and reproduced in another form.

Noble, generous, timid as she was, she prepared herself to ring into the ears of this noble man the word and the sound of money, to show him the sores of poverty, and force him to hear cries of distress when he was listening only for the melodious voice of Fame. Perhaps his love for her would lessen! If she had had no children, she would bravely and joyously have welcomed the new destiny her husband was making for her. Women who are brought up in opulence are quick to feel the emptiness of material enjoyments; and when their hearts, more wearied than withered, have once learned the happiness of a constant interchange of real feelings, they feel no shrinking from reduced outward circumstances, provided they are still acceptable to the man who has loved them. Their wishes, their pleasures, are subordinated to the caprices of that other life outside of their own; to them the only dreadful future is to lose him.

At this moment, therefore, her children came between Pépita and her true life, just as Science had come between herself and Balthazar. And thus, when she reached home after vespers, and threw herself into the deep armchair before the window of the parlor, she sent away her children, directing them to keep perfectly quiet, and despatched a message to her husband, through Lemulquinier, saying that she wished to see him. But although the old valet did his best to make his master leave the laboratory, Balthazar scarcely heeded him. Madame Claës thus gained time for reflection. She sat thinking, paying no attention to the hour nor the light. The thought of owing thirty thousand francs that could not be paid renewed her past anguish and joined it to that of the present and the future. This influx of painful interests, ideas, and feelings overcame her, and she wept.

As Balthazar entered at last through the panelled door, the expression of his face seemed to her more dreadful, more absorbed, more distracted than she had yet seen it. When he made her no answer she was magnetized for a moment by the fixity of that blank look emptied of all expression, by the consuming ideas that issued as if distilled from that bald brow. Under the shock of this impression she wished to die. But when she heard the callous voice, uttering a scientific wish at the moment when her heart was breaking, her courage came back to her; she resolved to struggle with that awful power which had torn a lover from her arms, a father from her children, a fortune from their home, happiness from all. And yet she could not repress a trepidation which made her quiver; in all her life no such solemn scene as this had taken place. This dreadful moment — did it not virtually contain her future, and gather within it all the past?

Weak and timid persons, or those whose excessive sensibility magnifies the smallest difficulties of life, men who tremble involuntarily before the masters of their fate, can now, one and all, conceive the rush of thoughts that crowded into the brain of this woman, and the feelings under the weight of which her heart was crushed as her husband slowly crossed the room towards the garden-door. Most women know that agony of inward deliberation in which Madame Claës was writhing. Even one whose heart has been tried by nothing worse than the declaration to a husband of some extravagance, or a debt to a dress-maker, will understand how its pulses swell and quicken when the matter is one of life itself.

A beautiful or graceful woman might have thrown herself at her husband's feet, might have called to her aid the attitudes of grief; but to Madame Claës the sense of physical defects only added to her fears. When she saw Balthazar about to leave the room, her impulse was to spring towards him; then a cruel thought restrained her — she should stand before him! would she not seem ridiculous in the eyes of a man no longer under the glamour of love — who might see true? She resolved to avoid all dangerous chances at so solemn a moment, and remained seated, saying in a clear voice,

"Balthazar."

He turned mechanically and coughed; then, paying no attention to his wife, he walked to one of the little square boxes that are placed at intervals along the wainscoting of every room in Holland and Belgium, and spat in it. This man, who took no thought of other persons, never forgot the inveterate habit of using those boxes. To poor Joséphine, unable to find a reason for this singularity, the constant care which her husband took of the furniture caused her at all times an unspeakable pang, but at this moment the pain was so violent that it put her beside herself and made her exclaim in a tone of impatience, which expressed her wounded feelings, —

"Monsieur, I am speaking to you!"

"What does that mean?" answered Balthazar, turning quickly, and casting a look of reviving intelligence upon his wife, which fell upon her like a thunderbolt.

"Forgive me, my friend," she said, turning pale. She tried to rise and put out her hand to him, but her strength gave way and she fell back. "I am dying!" she cried in a voice choked by sobs.

At the sight Balthazar had, like all abstracted persons, a vivid reaction of mind; and he divined, so to speak, the secret cause of this attack. Taking Madame Claës at once in his arms, he opened the door upon the little antechamber, and ran so rapidly up the ancient wooden staircase that his wife's dress having caught on the jaws of one of the griffins that supported the balustrade, a whole breadth was torn off with a loud noise. He kicked in the door of the vestibule between their chambers, but the door of Joséphine's bedroom was locked.

He gently placed her on a chair, saying to himself, "My God! the key, where is the key?"

"Thank you, dear friend," said Madame Claës, opening her eyes. "This is the first time for a long, long while that I have been so near your heart."

"Good God!" cried Claës, "the key! — here come the servants."

Joséphine signed to him to take a key that hung from a ribbon at her waist. After opening the door, Balthazar laid his wife on a sofa, and left the room to stop the frightened servants from coming up by giving them orders to serve the dinner; he then went back to Madame Claës.

"What is it, my dear life?" he said, sitting down beside her, and taking her hand and kissing it.

"Nothing — now," she answered. "I suffer no longer. Only, I would I had the power of God to pour all the gold of the world at thy feet."

"Why gold?" he asked. He took her in his arms, pressed her to him and kissed her once more upon the forehead. "Do you not give me the greatest of all riches in loving me as you do love me, my dear and precious wife?"

"Oh! my Balthazar, will you not drive away the anguish of our lives as your voice now drives out the misery of my heart? At last, at last, I see that you are still the same."

"What anguish do you speak of, dear?"

"My friend, we are ruined."

"Ruined!" he repeated. Then, with a smile, he stroked her hand, holding it within his own, and said in his tender voice, so long unheard: "To-morrow, dear love, our wealth may perhaps be limitless. Yesterday, in searching for a far more important secret, I think I found the means of crystallizing carbon, the substance of the diamond. Oh, my dear wife! in a few days' time you will forgive me all my forgetfulness — I am forgetful sometimes, am I not? Was I not harsh to you just now? Be indulgent for a man who never ceases to think of you, whose toils are full of you — of us."

"Enough, enough!" she said, "let us talk of it all to-night, dear friend. I suffered from too much grief, and now I suffer from too much joy."

"To-night," he resumed; "yes, willingly: we will talk of it. If I fall into meditation, remind me of this promise. To-night I desire to leave my work, my researches, and return to family joys, to the delights of the heart — Pépita, I need them, I thirst for them!"

"You will tell me what it is you seek, Balthazar?"

"Poor child, you cannot understand it."

"You think so? Ah! my friend, listen; for nearly four months I have studied chemistry that I might talk of it with you. I have read Fourcroy, Lavoisier, Chaptal, Nollet, Rouelle, Berthollet, Gay-Lussac, Spallanzani, Leuwenhoëk, Galvani, Volta, — in fact, all the books about the science you worship. You can tell me your secrets, I shall understand you."

"Oh! you are indeed an angel," cried Balthazar, falling at her feet, and shedding tears of tender feeling that made her quiver. "Yes, we will understand each other in all things."

"Ah!" she cried, "I would throw myself into those hellish fires which heat your furnaces to hear these words from your lips and to see you thus." Then, hearing her daughter's step in the anteroom, she sprang quickly forward. "What is it, Marguerite?" she said to her eldest daughter.

"My dear mother, Monsieur Pierquin has just come. If he stays to dinner we need some table-linen; you forgot to give it out this morning."

Madame Claës drew from her pocket a bunch of small keys and gave them to the young girl, pointing to the mahogany closets which lined the ante-chamber as she said:

"My daughter, take a set of the Graindorge linen; it is on your right."

"Since my dear Balthazar comes back to me, let the return be complete," she said, re-entering her chamber with a soft and arch expression upon her face. "My friend, go into your own room; do me the kindness to dress for dinner, Pierquin will be with us. Come, take off this ragged clothing; see those stains! Is it muriatic or sulphuric acid which left these yellow edges to the holes? Make yourself young again, — I will send you Mulquinier as soon as I have changed my dress."

Balthazar attempted to pass through the door of communication, forgetting that it was locked on his side. He went out through the anteroom.

"Marguerite, put the linen on a chair, and come and help me dress; I don't want Martha," said Madame Claës, calling her daughter.

Balthazar had caught Marguerite and turned her towards him with a joyous action, exclaiming: "Good-evening, my child; how pretty you are in your muslin gown and that pink sash!" Then he kissed her forehead and pressed her hand.

"Mamma, papa has kissed me!" cried Marguerite, running into her mother's room. "He seems so joyous, so happy!"

"My child, your father is a great man; for three years he has toiled for the fame and fortune of his family: he thinks he has attained the object of his search. This day is a festival for us all."

"My dear mamma," replied Marguerite, "we shall not be alone in our joy, for the servants have been so grieved to see him unlike himself. Oh! put on another sash, this is faded."

"So be it; but make haste, I want to speak to Pierquin. Where is he?"

"In the parlor, playing with Jean."

"Where are Gabriel and Félicie?"

"I hear them in the garden."

"Run down quickly and see that they do not pick the tulips; your father has not seen them in flower this year, and he may take a fancy to look at them after dinner. Tell Mulquinier to go up and assist your father in dressing."

V.

As Marguerite left the room, Madame Claës glanced at the children through the windows of her chamber, which looked on the garden, and saw that they were watching one of those insects with shining wings spotted with gold, commonly called "darning-needles."

"Be good, my darlings," she said, raising the lower sash of the window and leaving it up to air the room. Then she knocked gently on the door of communication, to assure herself that Balthazar had not fallen into abstraction. He opened it, and seeing him half-dressed, she said in joyous tones: —

"You won't leave me long with Pierquin, will you? Come as soon as you can."

Her step was so light as she descended that a listener would never have supposed her lame.

"When monsieur carried madame upstairs," said the old valet, whom she met on the staircase, "he tore this bit out of her dress, and he broke the jaw of that griffin; I'm sure I don't know who can put it on again. There's our staircase ruined — and it used to be so handsome!"

"Never mind, my poor Mulquinier; don't have it mended at all — it is not a misfortune," said his mistress.

"What can have happened?" thought Lemulquinier; "why is n't it a misfortune, I should like to know? has the master found the Absolute?"

"Good-evening, Monsieur Pierquin," said Madame Claës, opening the parlor door.

The notary rushed forward to give her his arm; as she never took any but that of her husband she thanked him with a smile and said, —

"Have you come for the thirty thousand francs?"

"Yes, madame; when I reached home I found a letter of advice from Messieurs Protez and Chiffreville, who have drawn six letters of exchange upon Monsieur Claës for five thousand francs each."

"Well, say nothing to Balthazar to-day," she replied. "Stay and dine with us. If he happens to ask why you came, find some plausible pretext, I entreat you. Give me the letter. I will speak to him myself about it. All is well," she added, noticing the lawyer's surprise. "In a few months my husband will probably pay off all the sums he has borrowed."

Hearing these words, which were said in a low voice, the notary looked at Mademoiselle Claës, who was entering the room from the garden followed by Gabriel and Félicie, and remarked, —

"I have never seen Mademoiselle Marguerite as pretty as she is at this moment."

Madame Claës, who was sitting in her armchair with little Jean upon her lap, raised her head and looked at her daughter, and then at the notary, with a pretended air of indifference.

Pierquin was a man of middle height, neither stout nor thin, with vulgar good looks, a face that expressed vexation rather than melancholy, and a pensive habit in which there was more of indecision than thought. People called him a misanthrope, but he was too eager after his own interests, and too extortionate towards others to have set up a genuine divorce from the world. His indifferent demeanor, his affected silence, his habitual custom of looking, as it were, into the void, seemed to indicate depth of character, while in fact they merely concealed the shallow insignificance of a notary busied exclusively with earthly interests; though he was still young enough to feel envy. To marry into the family of Claës would have been to him an object of extreme desire, if an instinct of avarice had not underlain it. He could seem generous, but for all that he was a keen reckoner. And thus, without explaining to himself the motive for his change of manner, his behavior was harsh, peremptory, and surly, like that of an ordinary business man, when he thought the Claës were ruined; accommodating, affectionate, and almost servile, when he saw reason to believe in a happy issue to his cousin's labors. Sometimes he beheld an infanta in Marguerite Claës, to whom no provincial notary might aspire; then he regarded her as any poor girl too happy if he deigned to make her his wife. He was a true provincial, and a Fleming; without malevolence, not devoid of devotion and kindheartedness, but led by a naïve selfishness which rendered all his better qualities incomplete, while certain absurdities of manner spoiled his personal appearance.

Madame Claës recollected the curt tone in which the notary had spoken to her that afternoon in the porch of the church, and she took note of the change which her present reply had wrought in his demeanor; she guessed its meaning and tried to read her daughter's mind by a penetrating glance, seeking to discover if she thought of her cousin; but the young girl's manner showed complete indifference.

After a few moments spent in general conversation on the current topics of the day, the master of the house came down from his bedroom, where his wife had heard with inexpressible delight the creaking sound of his boots as he trod the floor. The step was that of a young and active man, and foretold so complete a transformation, that the mere expectation of his appearance made Madame Claës quiver as he descended the stairs. Balthazar entered, dressed in the fashion of the period.

He wore highly polished top-boots, which allowed the upper part of the white silk stockings to appear, blue kerseymere small-clothes with gold buttons, a flowered white waistcoat, and a blue frock-coat. He had trimmed his beard, combed and perfumed his hair, pared his nails, and washed his hands, all with such care that he was scarcely recognizable to those who had seen him lately. Instead of an old man almost decrepit, his children, his wife, and the notary saw a Balthazar Claës who was forty years old, and whose courteous and affable presence was full of its former attractions. The weariness and suffering betrayed by the thin face and the clinging of the skin to the bones, had in themselves a sort of charm.

"Good-evening, Pierquin," said Monsieur Claës.

Once more a husband and a father, he took his youngest child from his wife's lap and tossed him in the air.

"See that little fellow!" he exclaimed to the notary. "Does n't such a pretty creature make you long to marry? Take my word for it, my dear Pierquin, family happiness consoles a man for everything. Up, up!" he cried, tossing Jean in the air; "down, down! up! down!"

The child laughed with all his heart as he went alternately to the ceiling and down to the carpet. The mother turned away her eyes that she might not betray the emotion which the simple play caused her, — simple apparently, but to her a domestic revolution.

"Let me see how you can walk," said Balthazar, putting his son on the floor and throwing himself on a sofa near his wife.

The child ran to its father, attracted by the glitter of the gold buttons which fastened the breeches just above the slashed tops of his boots.

"You are a darling!" cried Balthazar, kissing him; "you are a Claës, you walk straight. Well, Gabriel, how is Père Morillon?" he said to his eldest son, taking him by the ear and twisting it. "Are you struggling valiantly with your themes and your construing? have you taken sharp hold of mathematics?"

Then he rose, and went up to the notary with the affectionate courtesy that characterized him.

"My dear Pierquin," he said, "perhaps you have something to say to me." He took his arm to lead him to the garden, adding, "Come and see my tulips."

Madame Claës looked at her husband as he left the room, unable to repress the joy she felt in seeing him once more so young, so affable, so truly himself. She rose, took her daughter round the waist and kissed her, exclaiming: —

"My dear Marguerite, my darling child! I love you better than ever to-day."

"It is long since I have seen my father so kind," answered the young girl.

Lemulquinier announced dinner. To prevent Pierquin from offering her his arm, Madame Claës took that of her husband and led the way into the next room, the whole family following.

The dining-room, whose ceiling was supported by beams and decorated with paintings cleaned and restored every year, was furnished with tall oaken sideboards and buffets, on whose shelves stood many a curious piece of family china. The walls were hung with violet leather, on which designs of game and other hunting objects were stamped in gold. Carefully arranged here and there above the shelves, shone the brilliant plumage of strange birds, and the lustre of rare shells. The chairs, which evidently had not been changed since the beginning of the sixteenth century, showed the square shape with twisted columns and the low back covered with a fringed stuff, common to that period, and glorified by Raphael in his picture of the Madonna della Sedia. The wood of these chairs was now black, but the gilt nails shone as if new, and the stuff, carefully renewed from time to time, was of an admirable shade of red.

The whole life of Flanders with its Spanish innovations was in this room. The decanters and flasks on the dinner-table, with their graceful antique lines and swelling curves, had an air of respectability. The glasses were those old goblets with stems and feet which may be seen in the pictures of the Dutch or Flemish school. The dinner-service of faiënce, decorated with raised colored figures, in the manner of Bernard Palissy, came from the English manufactory of Wedgwood. The silver-ware was massive, with square sides and designs in high relief, — genuine family plate, whose pieces, in every variety of form, fashion, and chasing, showed the beginnings of prosperity and the progress towards fortune of the Claës family. The napkins were fringed, a fashion altogether Spanish; and as for the linen, it will readily be supposed that the Claës's household made it a point of honor to possess the best.

All this service of the table, silver, linen, and glass, were for the daily use of the family. The front house, where the social entertainments were given, had its own especial luxury, whose marvels, being reserved for great occasions, wore an air of dignity often lost to things which are, as it were, made common by daily use. Here, in the home quarter, everything bore the impress of patriarchal use and simplicity. And — for a final and delightful detail — a vine grew outside the house between the windows, whose tendrilled branches twined about the casements.

"You are faithful to the old traditions, madame," said Pierquin, as he received a plate of that celebrated thyme soup in which the Dutch and Flemish cooks put little force-meat balls and dice of fried bread. "This is the Sunday soup of our forefathers. Your house and that of my uncle des Raquets are the only ones where we still find this historic soup of the Netherlands. Ah! pardon me, old Monsieur Savaron de Savarus of Tournai makes it a matter of pride to keep up the custom; but everywhere else old Flanders is disappearing. Now-a-days everything is changing; furniture is made from Greek models; wherever you go you see helmets, lances, shields, and bows and arrows! Everybody is rebuilding his house, selling his old furniture, melting up his silver dishes, or exchanging them for Sèvres porcelain, — which does not compare with either old Dresden or with Chinese ware. Oh! as for me, I'm Flemish to the core; my heart actually bleeds to see the coppersmiths buying up our beautiful inlaid furniture for the mere value of the wood and the metal. The fact is, society wants to change its skin. Everything is being sacrificed, even the old methods of art. When people insist on going so fast, nothing is conscientiously done. During my last visit to Paris I was taken to see the pictures in the Louvre. On my word of honor, they are mere screen-painting, — no depth, no atmosphere; the painters were actually afraid to put colors on their canvas. And it is they who talk of overturning our ancient school of art! Ah, bah! —"

"Our old masters," replied Balthazar, "studied the combination of colors and their endurance by submitting them to the action of sun and rain. You are right enough, however; the material resources of art are less cultivated in these days than formerly."

Madame Claës was not listening to the conversation. The notary's remark that porcelain dinner-services were now the fashion, gave her the brilliant idea of selling a quantity of heavy silver-ware which she had inherited from her brother, — hoping to be able thus to pay off the thirty thousand francs which her husband owed.

"Ha! ha!" Balthazar was saying to Pierquin when Madame Claës's mind returned to the conversation, "so they are discussing my work in Douai, are they?"

"Yes," replied the notary, "every one is asking what it is you spend so much money on. Only yesterday I heard the chief-justice deploring that a man like you should be searching for the Philosopher's stone. I ventured to reply that you were too wise not to know that such a scheme was attempting the impossible, too much of a Christian to take God's work out of his hands; and, like every other Claës, too good a business man to spend your money for such befooling quackeries. Still, I admit that I share the regret people feel at your absence from society. You might as well not live here at all. Really, madame, you would have been delighted had you heard the praises showered on Monsieur Claës and on you."

"You acted like a faithful friend in repelling imputations whose least evil is to make me ridiculous," said Balthazar. "Ha! so they think me ruined? Well, my dear Pierquin, two months hence I shall give a fête in honor of my wedding-day whose magnificence will get me back the respect my dear townsmen bestow on wealth."

Madame Claës colored deeply. For two years the anniversary had been forgotten. Like madmen whose faculties shine at times with unwonted brilliancy, Balthazar was never more gracious and delightful in his tenderness than at this moment. He was full of attention to his children, and his conversation had the charms of grace, and wit, and pertinence. This return of fatherly feeling, so long absent, was certainly the truest fête he could give his wife, for whom his looks and words expressed once more that unbroken sympathy of heart for heart which reveals to each a delicious oneness of sentiment.

Old Lemulquinier seemed to renew his youth; he came and went about the table with unusual liveliness, caused by the accomplishment of his secret hopes. The sudden change in his master's ways was even more significant to him than to Madame Claës. Where the family saw happiness he saw fortune. While helping

Balthazar in his experiments he had grown to share his beliefs. Whether he really understood the drift of his master's researches from certain exclamations which escaped the chemist when expected results disappointed him, or whether the innate tendency of mankind towards imitation made him adopt the ideas of the man in whose atmosphere he lived, certain it is that Lemulquinier had conceived for his master a superstitious feeling that was a mixture of terror, admiration, and selfishness. The laboratory was to him what a lottery-office is to the masses, — organized hope. Every night he went to bed saying to himself, "To-morrow we may float in gold;" and every morning he woke with a faith as firm as that of the night before.

His name proved that his origin was wholly Flemish. In former days the lower classes were known by some name or nickname derived from their trades, their surroundings, their physical conformation, or their moral qualities. This name became the patronymic of the burgher family which each established as soon as he obtained his freedom. Sellers of linen thread were called in Flanders "*mulquiniers;*" and that no doubt was the trade of the particular ancestor of the old valet who passed from a state of serfdom to one of burgher dignity, until some unknown misfortune had again reduced his present descendant to the condition of a serf, with the addition of wages. The whole history of

Flanders and its linen-trade was epitomized in this old man, often called, by way of euphony, Mulquinier. He was not without originality, either of character or appearance. His face was triangular in shape, broad and long, and seamed by small-pox which had left innumerable white and shining patches that gave him a fantastic appearance. He was tall and thin; his whole demeanor solemn and mysterious; and his small eyes, yellow as the wig which was smoothly plastered on his head, cast none but oblique glances.

The old valet's outward man was in keeping with the feeling of curiosity which he everywhere inspired. His position as assistant to his master, the depositary of a secret jealously guarded and about which he maintained a rigid silence, invested him with a species of charm. The denizens of the rue de Paris watched him pass with an interest mingled with awe; to all their questions he returned sibylline answers big with mysterious treasures. Proud of being necessary to his master, he assumed an annoying authority over his companions, employing it to further his own interests and compel a submission which made him virtually the ruler of the house. Contrary to the custom of Flemish servants, who are deeply attached to the families whom they serve, Mulquinier cared only for Balthazar. If any trouble befel Madame Claës, or any joyful event happened to the family, he ate his bread and butter and drank his beer as phlegmatically as ever.

Dinner over, Madame Claës proposed that coffee should be served in the garden, by the bed of tulips which adorned the centre of it. The earthenware pots in which the bulbs were grown (the name of each flower being engraved on slate labels) were sunk in the ground and so arranged as to form a pyramid, at the summit of which rose a certain dragon's-head tulip which Balthazar alone possessed. This flower, named *tulipa Claësiana*, combined the seven colors; and the curved edges of each petal looked as though they were gilt. Balthazar's father, who had frequently refused ten thousand florins for this treasure, took such precautions against the theft of a single seed that he kept the plant always in the parlor and often spent whole days in contemplating it. The stem was enormous, erect, firm, and admirably green; the proportions of the plant were in harmony with the proportions of the flower, whose seven colors were distinguishable from each other with the clearly defined brilliancy which formerly gave such fabulous value to these dazzling plants.

"Here you have at least thirty or forty thousand francs' worth of tulips," said the notary, looking alternately at Madame Claës and at the many-colored pyramid. The former was too enthusiastic over the beauty of the flowers, which the setting sun was just then transforming into jewels, to observe the meaning of the notary's words.

"What good do they do you?" continued Pierquin, addressing Balthazar; "you ought to sell them."

"Bah! am I in want of money?" replied Claës, in the tone of a man to whom forty thousand francs was a matter of no consequence.

There was a moment's silence, during which the children made many exclamations.

"See this one, mamma!"

"Oh! here's a beauty!"

"Tell me the name of that one!"

"What a gulf for human reason to sound!" cried Balthazar, raising his hands and clasping them with a gesture of despair. "A compound of hydrogen and oxygen gives off, according to their relative proportions, under the same conditions and by the same principle, these manifold colors, each of which constitutes a distinct result."

His wife heard the words of his proposition, but it was uttered so rapidly that she did not seize its exact meaning; and Balthazar, as if remembering that she had studied his favorite science, made her a mysterious sign, saying, —

"You do not yet understand me, but you will."

Then he apparently fell back into the absorbed meditation now habitual to him.

"No, I am sure you do not understand him," said Pierquin, taking his coffee from Marguerite's hand. "The Ethiopian can't change his skin, nor the leopard his spots," he whispered to Madame Claës. "Have the goodness to remonstrate with him later; the devil himself could n't draw him out of his cogitation now; he is in it for to-day, at any rate."

So saying, he bade good-by to Claës, who pretended not to hear him, kissed little Jean in his mother's arms, and retired with a low bow.

When the street-door clanged behind him, Balthazar caught his wife round the waist, and put an end to the uneasiness his feigned revery was causing her by whispering in her ear, —

"I knew how to get rid of him."

Madame Claës turned her face to her husband, not ashamed to let him see the tears of happiness that filled her eyes: then she rested her forehead against his shoulder and let little Jean slide to the floor.

"Let us go back into the parlor," she said, after a pause.

Balthazar was exuberantly gay throughout the evening. He invented games for the children, and played with such zest himself that he did not notice two or three short absences made by his wife. About half-past nine, when Jean had gone to bed, Marguerite returned to the parlor after helping her sister Félicie to undress, and found her mother seated in the deep armchair, and her father holding his wife's hand as he talked to her. The young girl feared to disturb them, and was about to retire without speaking, when Madame Claës caught sight of her, and said: —

"Come in, Marguerite; come here, dear child." She drew her down, kissed her tenderly on the forehead, and added, "Carry your book into your own room; but do not sit up too late."

"Good-night, my darling daughter," said Balthazar.

Marguerite kissed her father and mother and went away. Husband and wife remained alone for some minutes without speaking, watching the last glimmer of the twilight as it faded from the trees in the garden, whose outlines were scarcely discernible through the gathering darkness. When night had almost fallen, Balthazar said to his wife in a voice of emotion, —

"Let us go upstairs."

Long before English manners and customs had consecrated the wife's chamber as a sacred spot, that of a Flemish woman was impenetrable. The good housewives of the Low Countries did not make it a symbol of virtue. It was to them a habit contracted from childhood, a domestic superstition, rendering the bedroom a delightful sanctuary of tender feelings, where simplicity blended with all that was most sweet and sacred in social life. Any woman in Madame Claës's position would have wished to gather about her the elegances of life, but Joséphine had done so with exquisite taste, knowing well how great an influence the aspect of our surroundings exerts upon the feelings of others. To a pretty creature it would have been mere luxury, to her it was a necessity. No one better understood the meaning of the saying, "A pretty woman is self-created," — a maxim which guided every action of Napoleon's first wife, and often made her false; whereas Madame Claës was ever natural and true.

Though Balthazar knew his wife's chamber well, his forgetfulness of material things had lately been so complete that he felt a thrill of soft emotion when he entered it, as though he saw it for the first time. The proud gayety of a triumphant woman glowed in the splendid colors of the tulips which rose from the long throats of Chinese vases judiciously placed about the room, and sparkled in the profusion of lights whose effect can only be compared to a joyous burst of martial music. The gleam of the wax candles cast a mellow sheen on the coverings of pearl-gray silk, whose monotony was relieved by touches of gold, soberly distributed here and there on a few ornaments, and by the varied colors of the tulips, which were like sheaves of precious stones. The secret of this choice arrangement — it was he, ever he! Joséphine could not tell him in words more eloquent that he was now and ever the mainspring of her joys and woes.

The aspect of that chamber put the soul deliciously at ease, cast out sad thoughts, and left a sense of pure and equable happiness. The silken coverings, brought from China, gave forth a soothing perfume that penetrated the system without fatiguing it. The curtains, carefully drawn, betrayed a desire for solitude, a jealous intention of guarding the sound of every word, of hiding every look of the reconquered husband. Madame Claës, wearing a dressing-robe of muslin, which was trimmed by a long pelerine with falls of lace that came about her throat, and adorned with her beautiful black hair, which was exquisitely glossy and fell on either side her forehead like a raven's wing, went to draw the tapestry portière that hung before the door and allowed no sound to penetrate the chamber from without.

VI.

At the doorway Joséphine turned, and threw to her husband, who was sitting near the chimney, one of those gay smiles with which a sensitive woman whose soul comes at moments into her face, rendering it beautiful, gives expression to irresistible hopes. Woman's greatest charm lies in her constant appeal to the generosity of man by the admission of a weakness which stirs his pride and wakens him to the nobler sentiments. Is not such an avowal of weakness full of magical seduction? When the rings of the portière had slipped with a muffled sound along the wooden rod, she turned towards Claës, and made as though she would hide her physical defects by resting her hand upon a chair and drawing herself gracefully forward. It was calling him to help her. Balthazar, sunk for a moment in contemplation of the olive-tinted head, which attracted and satisfied the eye as it stood out in relief against the soft gray background, rose to take his wife in his arms and carry her to her sofa. This was what she wanted.

"You promised me," she said, taking his hand which she held between her own magnetic palms, "to tell me the secret of your researches. Admit, dear friend, that I am worthy to know it, since I have had the courage to study a science condemned by the Church that I might be able to understand you. I am curious; hide nothing from me. Tell me first how it happened that you rose one morning anxious and oppressed, when over night I had left you happy."

"Is it to hear me talk of chemistry that you have made yourself so coquettishly delightful?"

"Dear friend, a confidence which puts me in your inner heart is the greatest of all pleasures for me; is it not a communion of souls which gives birth to the highest happiness of earth? Your love comes back to me not lessened, pure; I long to know what dream has had the power to keep it from me so long. Yes, I am more jealous of a thought than of all the women in the world. Love is vast, but it is not infinite, while Science has depths unfathomed, to which I will not let you go alone. I hate all that comes between us. If you win the glory for which you strive, I must be unhappy; it will bring you joy, while I — I alone — should be the giver of your happiness."

"No, my angel, it was not an idea, not a thought; it was a man that first led me into this glorious path."

"A man!" she cried in terror.

"Do you remember, Pépita, the Polish officer who stayed with us in 1809?"

"Do I remember him!" she exclaimed; "I am often annoyed because my memory still recalls those eyes, like tongues of fire darting from coals of hell, those hollows above the eyebrows, that broad skull stripped of hair, the upturned moustache, the angular, worn face! — What awful impassiveness in his bearing! Ah! surely if there had been a room in any inn I would never have allowed him to sleep here."

"That Polish gentleman," resumed Balthazar, "was named Adam de Wierzchownia. When you left us alone that evening in the parlor, we happened by chance to speak of chemistry. Compelled by poverty to give up the study of that science, he had become a soldier. It was, I think, by means of a glass of sugared water that we recognized each other as adepts. When I ordered Mulquinier to bring the sugar in pieces, the captain gave a start of surprise. 'Have you studied chemistry?' he asked. 'With Lavoisier,' I answered. 'You are happy in being rich and free,' he cried; then from the depths of his bosom came the sigh of a man, — one of those sighs which reveal a hell of anguish hidden in the brain or in the heart, a something ardent, concentrated, not to be expressed in words. He ended his sentence with a look that startled me. After a pause, he told me that Poland being at her last gasp he had taken refuge in Sweden. There he had sought consolation for his country's fate in the study of chemistry, for which he had always felt an irresistible vocation. 'And I see you recognize as I do,' he added, 'that gum arabic, sugar, and starch, reduced to powder, each yield a substance absolutely similar, with, when analyzed, the same qualitative result.'

"He paused again; and then, after examining me with a searching eye, he said confidentially, in a low voice, certain grave words whose general meaning alone remains fixed on my memory; but he spoke with a force of tone, with fervid inflections, with an energy of gesture, which stirred my very vitals, and struck my imagination as the hammer strikes the anvil. I will tell you briefly the arguments he used, which were to me like the live coal laid by the Almighty upon Isaiah's tongue; for my studies with Lavoisier enabled me to understand their full bearing.

"'Monsieur,' he said, 'the parity of these three substances, in appearance so distinct, led me to think that all the productions of nature ought to have a single principle. The researches of modern chemistry prove the truth of this law in the larger part of natural effects. Chemistry divides creation into two distinct parts, — organic nature, and inorganic nature. Organic nature, comprising as it does all animal and vegetable creations which show an organization more or less perfect, — or, to be more exact, a greater or lesser motive power, which gives more or less sensibility, — is, undoubtedly, the more important part of our earth. Now, analysis has reduced all the products of this nature to four simple substances, namely: three gases, nitrogen, hydrogen, and oxygen, and another simple substance, non-metallic and solid, carbon. Inorganic nature, on the contrary, so simple, devoid of movement and sensation, denied the power of growth (too hastily accorded to it by Linnæus), possesses fifty-three simple substances, or elements, whose different combinations make its products. Is it probable that means should be more numerous where a lesser number of results are produced?

"'My master's opinion was that these fifty-three primary bodies have one originating principle, acted upon in the past by some force the knowledge of which has perished to-day, but which human genius ought to rediscover. Well, then, suppose that this force does live and act again; we have chemical unity. Organic and inorganic nature would apparently then rest on four essential principles, — in fact, if we could decompose nitrogen which we ought to consider a negation, we should have but three. This brings us at once close upon the great Ternary of the ancients and of the alchemists of the Middle Ages, whom we do wrong to scorn. Modern chemistry is nothing more than that. It is much, and yet little, — much, because the science has never recoiled before difficulty; little, in comparison with what remains to be done. Chance has served her well, my noble Science! Is not that tear of crystallized pure carbon, the diamond, seemingly the last substance possible to create? The old alchemists, who thought that gold was decomposable and therefore creatable, shrank from the idea of producing the diamond. Yet we have discovered the nature and the law of its composition.

"'As for me,' he continued, 'I have gone farther still. An experiment proved to me that the mysterious Ternary, which has occupied the human mind from time immemorial, will not be found by physical analyses, which lack direction to a fixed point. I will relate, in the first place, the experiment itself.

"'Sow cress-seed (to take one among the many substances of organic nature) in flour of brimstone (to take another simple substance). Sprinkle the seed with distilled water, that no unknown element may reach the product of the germination. The seed germinates, and sprouts from a known environment, and feeds only on elements known by analysis. Cut off the stalks from time to time, till you get a sufficient quantity to produce after burning them enough ashes for the experiment. Well, by analyzing those ashes, you will obtain silicic acid, aluminium, phosphate and carbonate of lime, carbonate of magnesia, the sulphate and carbonate of potassium, and oxide of iron, precisely as if the cress had grown in ordinary earth, beside a brook. Now, those elements did not exist in the brimstone, a simple substance which served for soil to the cress, nor in the distilled water with which the plant was nourished, whose composition was known. But since they are no more to be found in the seed itself, we can explain their presence in the plant only by assuming the existence of a primary element common to all the substances contained in the cress, and also to all those by which we environed it. Thus the air, the distilled water, the brimstone, and the various elements which analysis finds in the cress, namely, potash, lime, magnesia, aluminium, etc., should have one common principle floating in the atmosphere like light of the sun.

"'From this unimpeachable experiment,' he cried, 'I deduce the existence of the Alkahest, the Absolute, — a substance common to all created things, differentiated by one primary force. Such is the net meaning and position of the problem of the Absolute, which appears to me to be solvable. In it we find the mysterious Ternary, before whose shrine humanity has knelt from the dawn of ages, — the primary matter, the medium, the product. We find that terrible number THREE in all things human. It governs religions, sciences, and laws.

"'It was at this point,' he went on, 'that poverty put an end to my researches. You were the pupil of

Lavoisier, you are rich, and master of your own time; I will therefore tell you my conjectures. Listen to the conclusions my personal experiments have led me to foresee. The PRIME MATTER must be the common principle in the three gases and in carbon. The MEDIUM must be the principle common to negative and positive electricity. Proceed to the discovery of the proofs that will establish those two truths; you will then find the explanation of all phenomenal existence.

"'Oh, monsieur!' he cried, striking his brow, 'when I know that I carry here the last word of Creation, when intuitively I perceive the Unconditioned, is it *living* to be dragged hither and thither in the ruck of men who fly at each other's throats at the word of command without knowing what they are doing? My actual life is an inverted dream. My body comes and goes and acts; it moves amid bullets, and cannon, and men; it crosses Europe at the will of a power I obey and yet despise. My soul has no consciousness of these acts; it is fixed, immovable, plunged in one idea, rapt in that idea, the Search for the Alkahest, — for that principle by which seeds that are absolutely alike, growing in the same environments, produce, some a white, others a yellow flower. The same phenomenon is seen in silkworms fed from the same leaves, and apparently constituted exactly alike, — one produces yellow silk, another white; and if we come to man himself, we find that children often resemble neither father nor mother. The logical deduction from this fact surely involves the explanation of all the phenomena of nature.

"'Ah, what can be more in harmony with our ideas of God than to believe he created all things by the simplest method? The Pythagorean worship of ONE, from which come all other numbers, and which represents Primal Matter; that of the number Two, the first aggregation and the type of all the rest; that of the number THREE, which throughout all time has symbolized God,—that is to say, Matter, Force, and Product,—are they not an echo, lingering along the ages, of some confused knowledge of the Absolute? Stahl, Becker, Paracelsus, Agrippa, all the great Searchers into occult causes took the Great Triad for their watchword,—in other words, the Ternary. Ignorant men who despise alchemy, that transcendent chemistry, are not aware that our work is only carrying onward the passionate researches of those great men. Had I found the Absolute, the Unconditioned, I meant to have grappled with Motion. Ah! while I am swallowing gunpowder and leading men uselessly to their death, my former master is piling discovery upon discovery! he is soaring towards the Absolute, while I—I shall die like a dog in the trenches!'

"When this poor grand man recovered his composure, he said, in a touching tone of brotherhood, 'If I see cause for a great experiment I will bequeath it to you before I die.'—My Pépita," cried Balthazar, taking his wife's hands, "tears of anguish rolled down his hollow cheeks, as he cast into my soul the fiery arguments that Lavoisier had timidly recognized without daring to follow them out —"

"Oh!" cried Madame Claës, unable to refrain from interrupting her husband, "that man, passing one night under our roof, was able to deprive us of your love, to destroy with a phrase, a word, the happiness of a family! Oh, my dear Balthazar, did he make the sign of the cross? did you examine him? The Tempter alone could have had that flaming eye which sent forth the fire of Prometheus. Yes, none but the Devil could have torn you from me. From that day you have been neither husband, nor father, nor master of your family."

"What!" exclaimed Balthazar, springing to his feet and casting a piercing glance at his wife, "do you blame your husband for rising above the level of other men that he may lay at your feet the divine purple of his glory, as a paltry offering in exchange for the treasures of your heart! Ah, my Pépita," he cried, "you do not know what I have done. In these three years I have made giant strides —"

His face seemed to his wife at this moment more transfigured under the fires of genius than she had ever seen it under the fires of love; and she wept as she listened to him.

"I have combined chlorine and nitrogen; I have decomposed many substances hitherto considered simple; I have discovered new metals. Why!" he continued, noticing that his wife wept, "I have even decomposed tears. Tears contain a little phosphate of lime, chloride of sodium, mucin, and water."

He went on speaking, without observing the spasm of pain that contracted Joséphine's features; he was again astride of Science, which bore him with outspread wings far away from material existence.

"This analysis, my dear," he went on, "is one of the most convincing proofs of the theory of the Absolute. All life involves combustion. According to the greater or the lesser activity of the fire on its hearth is life more or less enduring. In like manner, the destruction of mineral bodies is indefinitely retarded, because in their case combustion is nominal, latent, or imperceptible. In like manner, again, vegetables, which are constantly revived by combinations producing dampness, live indefinitely; in fact, we still possess certain vegetables which existed before the period of the last cataclysm. But each time that nature has perfected an organism and then, for some unknown reason, has introduced into it sensation, instinct, or intelligence (three marked stages of the organic system), these three agencies necessitate a combustion whose activity is in direct proportion to the result obtained. Man, who represents the highest point of intelligence, and who offers us the only organism by which we arrive at a power that is semi-creative — namely, THOUGHT — is, among all zoölogical creations, the one in which combustion is found in its most intense degree; whose powerful effects may in fact be seen to some extent in the phosphates, sulphates, and carbonates which man's body reveals to our analysis. May not these substances be traces left within him of the passage of the electric fluid which is the principle of all fertilization? Would not electricity manifest itself by a greater variety of compounds in him than in any other animal? Should not he have faculties above those of all other created beings for the purpose of absorbing fuller portions of the Absolute principle? and may he not assimilate that principle so as to produce, in some more perfect mechanism, his force and his ideas? I think so. Man is a retort. In my judgment, the brain of an idiot contains too little phosphorus or other product of electro-magnetism, that of a madman too much; the brain of an ordinary man has but little, while that of a man of genius is saturated to its due degree. The man constantly in love, the street-porter, the dancer, the large eater, are the ones who disperse the force resulting from their electrical apparatus. Consequently, our feelings — "

"Enough, Balthazar! you terrify me; you commit sacrilege. What, is my love — "

"An ethereal matter disengaged, an emanation, the key of the Absolute. Conceive if I — I, the first, should find it, find it, find it!"

As he uttered the words in three rising tones, the expression of his face rose by degrees to inspiration. "I shall make metals," he cried; "I shall make diamonds, I shall be a co-worker with Nature!"

"Will you be the happier?" she asked in despair. "Accursed science! accursed demon! You forget, Claës, that you commit the sin of pride, the sin of which Satan was guilty; you assume the attributes of God."

"Oh! oh! God!"

"He denies Him!" she cried, wringing her hands. "Claës, God wields a power that you can never gain."

At this argument, which seemed to discredit his beloved Science, he looked at his wife and trembled.

"What power?" he asked.

"Primal force — motion," she replied. "This is what I learn from the books your mania has constrained me to read. Analyze fruits, flowers, Malaga wine; you will discover, undoubtedly, that their substances come, like those of your water-cress, from a medium that seems foreign to them. You can, if need be, find them in nature; but when you have them, can you combine them? can you make the flowers, the fruits, the Malaga wine? Will you have grasped the inscrutable effects of the sun, of the atmosphere of Spain? Ah! decomposing is not creating."

"If I discover the magistral force, I shall be able to create."

"Will nothing stop him?" cried Pépita. "Oh! my love, my love! it is killed! I have lost him!"

She wept bitterly, and her eyes, illumined by grief and by the sanctity of the feelings that flooded her soul, shone with greater beauty than ever through her tears.

"Yes," she resumed in a broken voice, "you are dead to all. I see it but too well. Science is more powerful within you than your own self; it bears you to heights from which you will return no more to be the companion of a poor woman. What joys can I still offer you? Ah! I would fain believe, as a wretched consolation, that God has indeed created you to make manifest his works, to chant his praises; that he has put within your breast the irresistible power that has mastered you — But no; God is good; he would keep in your heart some thoughts of the woman who adores you, of the children you are bound to protect. It is the Evil One alone who is helping you to walk amid these fathomless abysses, these clouds of outer darkness, where the light of faith does not guide you, — nothing guides you but a terrible belief in your own faculties! Were it otherwise, would you not have seen that you have wasted nine hundred thousand francs in three years? Oh! do me justice, you, my God on earth! I reproach you not; were we alone I would bring you, on my knees, all that I possess and say, 'Take it, fling it into your furnace, turn it into smoke;' and I should laugh to see it float away in vapor. Were you poor, I would beg without shame for the coal to light your furnace. Oh! could my body yield your hateful Alkahest, I would fling myself upon those fires with joy, since your glory, your delight is in that unfound secret. But our children, Claës, our children! what will become of them if you do not soon discover this hellish thing? Do you know why Pierquin came to-day? He came for thirty thousand francs, which you owe and cannot pay. I told him that you had the money, so that I might spare you the mortification of his questions; but to get it I must sell our family silver."

She saw her husband's eyes grow moist, and she flung herself despairingly at his feet, raising up to him her supplicating hands.

"My friend," she cried, "refrain awhile from these researches; let us economize, let us save the money that may enable you to take them up hereafter, — if, indeed, you cannot renounce this work. Oh! I do not condemn it; I will heat your furnaces if you ask it; but I implore you, do not reduce our children to beggary. Perhaps you cannot love them, Science may have consumed your heart; but oh! do not bequeath them a wretched life in place of the happiness you owe them. Motherhood has sometimes been too weak a power in my heart; yes, I have sometimes wished I were not a mother, that I might be closer to your soul, your life! And now, to stifle my remorse, must I plead the cause of my children before you, and not my own?"

Her hair fell loose and floated over her shoulders, her eyes shot forth her feelings as though they had been arrows. She triumphed over her rival. Balthazar lifted her, carried her to the sofa, and knelt at her feet.

"Have I caused you such grief?" he said, in the tone of a man waking from a painful dream.

"My poor Claës! yes, and you will cause me more, in spite of yourself," she said, passing her hand over his hair. "Sit here beside me," she continued, pointing to the sofa. "Ah! I can forget it all now, now that you come back to us; all can be repaired — but you will not abandon me again? say that you will not! My noble husband, grant me a woman's influence on your heart, that influence which is so needful to the happiness of suffering artists, to the troubled minds of great men. You may be harsh to me, angry with me if you will, but let me check you a little for your good. I will never abuse the power if you will grant it. Be famous, but be happy too. Do not love Chemistry better than you love us. Hear me, we will be generous; we will let Science share your heart; but oh! my Claës, be just; let us have our half. Tell me, is not my disinterestedness sublime?"

She made him smile. With the marvellous art such women possess, she carried the momentous question into the regions of pleasantry where women reign. But though she seemed to laugh, her heart was violently contracted and could not easily recover the quiet even action that was habitual to it. And yet, as she saw in the eyes of Balthazar the rebirth of a love which was once her glory, the full return of a power she thought she had lost, she said to him with a smile: —

"Believe me, Balthazar, nature made us to feel; and though you may wish us to be mere electrical machines, yet your gases and your ethereal disengaged matters will never explain the gift we possess of looking into futurity."

"Yes," he exclaimed, "by affinity. The power of vision which makes the poet, the power of deduction which makes the man of science, are based on invisible affinities, intangible, imponderable, which vulgar minds class as moral phenomena, whereas they are physical effects. The prophet sees and deduces. Unfortunately, such affinities are too rare and too obscure to be subjected to analysis or observation."

"Is this," she said, giving him a kiss to drive away the Chemistry she had so unfortunately reawakened, "what you call an affinity?"

"No; it is a compound; two substances that are equivalents are neutral, they produce no reaction —"

"Oh! hush, hush," she cried, "you will make me die of grief. I can never bear to see my rival in the transports of your love."

"But, my dear life, I think only of you. My work is for the glory of my family. You are the basis of all my hopes."

"Ah, look me in the eyes!"

The scene had made her as beautiful as a young woman; of her whole person Balthazar saw only her head, rising from a cloud of lace and muslin.

"Yes, I have done wrong to abandon you for Science," he said. "If I fall back into thought and preoccupation, then, my Pépita, you must drag me from them; I desire it."

She lowered her eyes and let him take her hand, her greatest beauty, — a hand that was both strong and delicate.

"But I ask more," she said.

"You are so lovely, so delightful, you can obtain all," he answered.

"I wish to destroy that laboratory, and chain up Science," she said, with fire in her eyes.

"So be it — let Chemistry go to the devil!"

"This moment effaces all!" she cried. "Make me suffer now, if you will."

Tears came to Balthazar's eyes, as he heard these words.

"You were right, love," he said. "I have seen you through a veil; I have not understood you."

"If it concerned only me," she said, "willingly would I have suffered in silence, never would I have raised my voice against my sovereign. But your sons must be thought of, Claës. If you continue to dissipate your property, no matter how glorious the object you have in view the world will take little account of it, it will only blame you and yours. But surely, it is enough for a man of your noble nature that his wife has shown him a danger he did not perceive. We will talk of this no more," she cried, with a smile and a glance of coquetry. "To-night, my Claës, let us not be less than happy."

VII.

On the morrow of this evening so eventful for the Claës family, Balthazar, from whom Joséphine had doubtless obtained some promise as to the cessation of his researches, remained in the parlor, and did not enter his laboratory. The succeeding day the household prepared to move into the country, where they stayed for more than two months, only returning to town in time to prepare for the fête which Claës determined to give, as in former years, to commemorate his wedding day. He now began by degrees to obtain proof of the disorder which his experiments and his indifference had brought into his business affairs.

Madame Claës, far from irritating the wound by remarking on it, continually found remedies for the evil that was done. Of the seven servants who customarily served the family, there now remained only Lemulquinier, Josette the cook, and an old waiting-woman, named Martha, who had never left her mistress since the latter left her convent. It was of course impossible to give a fête to the whole society of Douai with so few servants, but Madame Claës overcame all difficulties by proposing to send to Paris for a cook, to train the gardener's son as a waiter, and to borrow Pierquin's manservant. Thus the pinched circumstances of the family passed unnoticed by the community.

During the twenty days of preparation for the fête, Madame Claës was cleverly able to outwit her husband's listlessness. She commissioned him to select the rarest plants and flowers to decorate the grand staircase, the gallery, and the salons; then she sent him to Dunkerque to order one of those monstrous fish which are the glory of the burgher tables in the northern departments. A fête like that the Claës were about to give is a serious affair, involving thought and care and active correspondence, in a land where traditions of hospitality put the family honor so much at stake that to servants as well as masters a grand dinner is like a victory won over the guests. Oysters arrived from Ostend, grouse were imported from Scotland, fruits came from Paris; in short, not the smallest accessory was lacking to the hereditary luxury.

A ball at the House of Claës had an importance of its own. The government of the department was then at Douai, and the anniversary fête of the Claës usually opened the winter season and set the fashion to the neighborhood. For fifteen years, Balthazar had endeavored to make it a distinguished occasion, and had succeeded so well that the fête was talked of throughout a circumference of sixty miles, and the toilettes, the guests, the smallest details, the novelties exhibited, and the events that took place, were discussed far and wide. These preparations now prevented Claës from thinking, for the time being, of the Alkahest. Since his return to social life and domestic ideas, the servant of science had recovered his self-love as a man, as a Fleming, as the master of a household, and he now took pleasure in the thought of surprising the whole country. He resolved to give a special character to this ball by some exquisite novelty; and he chose, among all other caprices of luxury, the loveliest, the richest, and the most fleeting, — he turned the old mansion into a fairy bower of rare plants and flowers, and prepared choice bouquets for all the ladies.

The other details of the fête were in keeping with this unheard-of luxury, and nothing seemed likely to mar the effect. But the Twenty-ninth Bulletin and the news of the terrible disasters of the grand army in Russia, and at the passage of the Beresina, were made known on the afternoon of the appointed day. A sincere and profound grief was felt in Douai, and those who were present at the fête, moved by a natural feeling of patriotism, unanimously declined to dance.

Among the letters which arrived that day in Douai, was one for Balthazar from Monsieur de Wierzchownia, then in Dresden and dying, he wrote, from wounds received in one of the late engagements. He remembered his promise, and desired to bequeath to his former host several ideas on the subject of the Absolute, which had come to him since the period of their meeting. The letter plunged Claës into a revery which apparently did honor to his patriotism; but his wife was not misled by it. To her, this festal day brought a double mourning: and the ball, during which the House of Claës shone with departing lustre, was sombre and sad in spite of its magnificence, and the many choice treasures gathered by the hands of six generations, which the people of Douai now beheld for the last time.

Marguerite Claës, just sixteen, was the queen of the day, and on this occasion her parents presented her to society. She attracted all eyes by the extreme simplicity and candor of her air and manner, and especially by the harmony of her form and countenance with the characteristics of her home. She was the embodiment of the Flemish girl whom the painters of that country loved to represent, — the head perfectly rounded and full, chestnut hair parted in the middle and laid smoothly on the brow, gray eyes with a mixture of green, handsome arms, natural stoutness which did not detract from her beauty, a timid air, and yet, on the high square brow an expression of firmness, hidden at present under an apparent calmness and docility. Without being sad or melancholy, she seemed to have little natural enjoyment. Reflectiveness, order, a sense of duty, the three chief expressions of Flemish nature, were the characteristics of a face that seemed cold at first sight, but to which the eye was recalled by a certain grace of outline and a placid pride which seemed the pledges of domestic happiness. By one of those freaks which physiologists have not yet explained, she bore no likeness to either father or mother, but was the living image of her maternal great-grandmother, a Conyncks of Bruges, whose portrait, religiously preserved, bore witness to the resemblance.

The supper gave some life to the ball. If the military disasters forbade the delights of dancing, every one felt that they need not exclude the pleasures of the table. The true patriots, however, retired early; only the more indifferent remained, together with a few card-players and the intimate friends of the family. Little by little the brilliantly lighted house, to which all the notabilities of Douai had flocked, sank into silence, and by one o'clock in the morning the great gallery was deserted, the lights were extinguished in one salon after another, and the court-yard, lately so bustling and brilliant, grew dark and gloomy, — prophetic image of the future that lay before the family. When the Claës returned to their own appartement, Balthazar gave his wife the letter he had received from the Polish officer:

Joséphine returned it with a mournful gesture; she foresaw the coming doom.

From that day forth, Balthazar made no attempt to disguise the weariness and the depression that assailed him. In the mornings, after the family breakfast, he played for awhile in the parlor with little Jean, and talked to his daughters, who were busy with their sewing, or embroidery or lace-work; but he soon wearied of the play and of the talk, and seemed at last to get through with them as a duty. When his wife came down again after dressing, she always found him sitting in an easy-chair looking blankly at Marguerite and Félicie, quite undisturbed by the rattle of their bobbins. When the newspaper was brought in, he read it slowly like a retired merchant at a loss how to kill the time. Then he would get up, look at the sky through the window panes, go back to his chair and mend the fire drearily, as though he were deprived of all consciousness of his own movements by the tyranny of ideas.

Madame Claës keenly regretted her defects of education and memory. It was difficult for her to sustain an interesting conversation for any length of time; perhaps this is always difficult between two persons who have said everything to each other, and are forced to seek for subjects of interest outside the life of the heart, or the life of material existence. The life of the heart has its own moments of expansion which need some stimulus to bring them forth; discussions of material life cannot long occupy superior minds accustomed to decide promptly; and the mere gossip of society is intolerable to loving natures. Consequently, two isolated beings who know each other thoroughly ought to seek their enjoyments in the higher regions of thought; for it is impossible to satisfy with paltry things the immensity of the relation between them. Moreover, when a man has accustomed himself to deal with great subjects, he becomes unamusable, unless he preserves in the depths of his heart a certain guileless simplicity and unconstraint which often make great geniuses such charming children; but the childhood of the heart is a rare human phenomenon among those whose mission it is to see all, know all, and comprehend all.

During these first months, Madame Claës worked her way through this critical situation, by unwearying efforts, which love or necessity suggested to her. She tried to learn backgammon, which she had never been able to play, but now, from an impetus easy to understand, she ended by mastering it. Then she interested Balthazar in the education of his daughters, and asked him to direct their studies. All such resources were, however, soon exhausted. There came a time when Joséphine's relation to Balthazar was like that of Madame de Maintenon to Louis XIV.; she had to amuse the unamusable, but without the pomps of power or the wiles of a court which could play comedies like the sham embassies from the King of Siam and the Shah of Persia. After wasting the revenues of France, Louis XIV., no longer young or successful, was reduced to the expedients of a family heir to raise the money he needed; in the midst of his grandeur he felt his impotence, and the royal nurse who had rocked the cradles of his children was often at her wit's end to rock his, or soothe the monarch now suffering from his misuse of men and things, of life and God. Claës, on the contrary, suffered from too much power. Stifling in the clutch of a single thought, he dreamed of the pomps of Science, of treasures for the human race, of glory for himself. He suffered as artists suffer in the grip of poverty, as Samson suffered beneath the pillars of the temple. The result was the same for the two sovereigns; though the intellectual monarch was crushed by his inward force, the other by his weakness.

What could Pépita do, singly, against this species of scientific nostalgia? After employing every means that family life afforded her, she called society to the rescue, and gave two "cafés" every week. Cafés at Douai took the place of teas. A café was an assemblage at which, during a whole evening, the guests sipped the delicious wines and liqueurs which overflow the cellars of that ever-blessed land, ate the Flemish dainties and took their *café noir* or their *café au lait frappé*, while the women sang ballads, discussed each other's toilettes, and related the gossip of the day. It was a living picture by Mieris or Terburg, without the pointed gray hats, the scarlet plumes, or the beautiful costumes of the sixteenth century. And yet, Balthazar's efforts to play the part of host, his constrained courtesy, his forced animation, left him the next day in a state of languor which showed but too plainly the depths of the inward ill.

These continual fêtes, weak remedies for the real evil, only increased it. Like branches which caught him as he rolled down the precipice, they retarded Claës's fall, but in the end he fell the heavier. Though he never spoke of his former occupations, never showed the least regret for the promise he had given not to renew his researches, he grew to have the melancholy motions, the feeble voice, the depression of a sick person. The ennui that possessed him showed at times in the very manner with which he picked up the tongs and built fantastic pyramids in the fire with bits of coal, utterly unconscious of what he was doing. When night came he was evidently relieved; sleep no doubt released him from the importunities of thought: the next day he rose wearily to encounter another day, — seeming to measure time as the tired traveller measures the desert he is forced to cross.

If Madame Claës knew the cause of this languor she endeavored not to see the extent of its ravages. Full of courage against the sufferings of the mind, she was helpless against the generous impulses of the heart. She dared not question Balthazar when she saw him listening to the laughter of little Jean or the chatter of his girls, with the air of a man absorbed in secret thoughts; but she shuddered when she saw him shake off his melancholy and try, with generous intent, to seem cheerful, that he might not distress others. The little coquetries of the father with his daughters, or his games with little Jean, moistened the eyes of the poor wife, who often left the room to hide the feelings that heroic effort caused her, — a heroism the cost of which is well understood by women, a generosity that well-nigh breaks their heart. At such times Madame Claës longed to say, "Kill me, and do what you will!"

Little by little Balthazar's eyes lost their fire and took the glaucous opaque tint which overspreads the eyes of old men. His attentions to his wife, his manner of speaking, his whole bearing, grew heavy and inert. These symptoms became more marked towards the end of April, terrifying Madame Claës, to whom the sight was now intolerable, and who had all along reproached herself a thousand times while she admired the Flemish loyalty which kept her husband faithful to his promise.

At last, one day when Balthazar seemed more depressed than ever, she hesitated no longer; she resolved to sacrifice everything and bring him back to life.

"Dear friend," she said, "I release you from your promise."

Balthazar looked at her in amazement.

"You are thinking of your researches, are you not?" she continued.

He answered by a gesture of startling eagerness. Far from remonstrating, Madame Claës, who had had leisure to sound the abyss into which they were about to fall together, took his hand and pressed it, smiling.

"Thank you," she said; "now I am sure of my power. You sacrificed more than your life to me. In future, be the sacrifices mine. Though I have sold some of my diamonds, enough are left, with those my brother gave me, to get the necessary money for your experiments. I intended those jewels for my daughters, but your glory shall sparkle in their stead; and, besides, you will some day replace them with other and finer diamonds."

The joy that suddenly lighted her husband's face was like a death-knell to the wife: she saw, with anguish, that the man's passion was stronger than himself. Claës had faith in his work which enabled him to walk without faltering on a path which, to his wife, was the edge of a precipice. For him faith, for her doubt,—

for her the heavier burden: does not the woman ever suffer for the two? At this moment she chose to believe in his success, that she might justify to herself her connivance in the probable wreck of their fortunes.

"The love of all my life can be no recompense for your devotion, Pépita," said Claës, deeply moved.

He had scarcely uttered the words when Marguerite and Félicie entered the room and wished him good-morning. Madame Claës lowered her eyes and remained for a moment speechless in presence of her children, whose future she had just sacrificed to a delusion; her husband, on the contrary, took them on his knees, and talked to them gayly, delighted to give vent to the joy that choked him.

From this day Madame Claës shared the impassioned life of her husband. The future of her children, their father's credit, were two motives as powerful to her as glory and science were to Claës. After the diamonds were sold in Paris, and the purchase of chemicals was again begun, the unhappy woman never knew another hour's peace of mind. The demon of Science and the frenzy of research which consumed her husband now agitated her own mind; she lived in a state of continual expectation, and sat half-lifeless for days together in the deep armchair, paralyzed by the very violence of her wishes, which, finding no food, like those of

Balthazar, in the daily hopes of the laboratory, tormented her spirit and aggravated her doubts and fears. Sometimes, blaming herself for compliance with a passion whose object was futile and condemned by the Church, she would rise, go to the window on the court-yard and gaze with terror at the chimney of the laboratory. If the smoke were rising, an expression of despair came into her face, a conflict of thoughts and feelings raged in her heart and mind. She beheld her children's future fleeing in that smoke, but — was she not saving their father's life? was it not her first duty to make him happy? This last thought calmed her for a moment.

She obtained the right to enter the laboratory and remain there; but even this melancholy satisfaction was soon renounced. Her sufferings were too keen when she saw that Balthazar took no notice of her, or seemed at times annoyed by her presence; in that fatal place she went through paroxysms of jealous impatience, angry desires to destroy the building, — a living death of untold miseries. Lemulquinier became to her a species of barometer: if she heard him whistle as he laid the breakfast-table or the dinner-table, she guessed that Balthazar's experiments were satisfactory, and there were prospects of a coming success; if, on the other hand, the man were morose and gloomy, she looked at him and trembled, — Balthazar must surely be dissatisfied. Mistress and valet ended by understanding each other, notwithstanding the proud reserve of the one and the reluctant submission of the other.

Feeble and defenceless against the terrible prostrations of thought, the poor woman at last gave way under the alternations of hope and despair which increased the distress of the loving wife, and the anxieties of the mother trembling for her children. She now practised the doleful silence which formerly chilled her heart, not observing the gloom that pervaded the house, where whole days went by in that melancholy parlor without a smile, often without a word. Led by sad maternal foresight, she trained her daughters to household work, and tried to make them skilful in womanly employments, that they might have the means of living if destitution came. The outward calm of this quiet home covered terrible agitations. Towards the end of the summer Balthazar had used the money derived from the diamonds, and was twenty thousand francs in debt to Messieurs Protez and Chiffreville.

In August, 1813, about a year after the scene with which this history begins, although Claës had made a few valuable experiments, for which, unfortunately, he cared but little, his efforts had been without result as to the real object of his researches. There came a day when he ended the whole series of experiments, and the sense of his impotence crushed him; the certainty of having fruitlessly wasted enormous sums of money drove him to despair. It was a frightful catastrophe. He left the garret, descended slowly to the parlor, and threw himself into a chair in the midst of his children, remaining motionless for some minutes as though dead, making no answer to the questions his wife pressed upon him. Tears came at last to his relief, and he rushed to his own chamber that no one might witness his despair.

Joséphine followed him and drew him into her own room, where, alone with her, Balthazar gave vent to his anguish. These tears of a man, these broken words of the hopeless toiler, these bitter regrets of the husband and father, did Madame Claës more harm than all her past sufferings. The victim consoled the executioner. When Balthazar said to her in a tone of dreadful conviction: "I am a wretch; I have gambled away the lives of my children, and your life; you can have no happiness unless I kill myself," — the words struck home to her heart; she knew her husband's nature enough to fear he might at once act out the despairing wish: an inward convulsion, disturbing the very sources of life itself, seized her, and was all the more dangerous because she controlled its violent effects beneath a deceptive calm of manner.

"My friend," she said, "I have consulted, not Pierquin, whose friendship does not hinder him from feeling some secret satisfaction at our ruin, but an old man who has been as good to me as a father. The Abbé de Solis, my confessor, has shown me how we can still save ourselves from ruin. He came to see the pictures. The value of those in the gallery is enough to pay the sums you have borrowed on your property, and also all that you owe to Messieurs Protez and Chiffreville, who have no doubt an account against you."

Claës made an affirmative sign and bowed his head, the hair of which was now white.

"Monsieur de Solis knows the Happe and Duncker families of Amsterdam; they have a mania for pictures, and are anxious, like all parvenus, to display a luxury which ought to belong only to the old families: he thinks they will pay the full value of ours. By this means we can recover our independence, and out of the purchase money, which will amount to over one hundred thousand ducats, you will have enough to continue the experiments. Your daughters and I will be content with very little; we can fill up the empty frames with other pictures in course of time and by economy; meantime you will be happy."

Balthazar raised his head and looked at his wife with a joy that was mingled with fear. Their rôles were changed. The wife was the protector of the husband. He, so tender, he, whose heart was so at one with his Pépita's, now held her in his arms without perceiving the horrible convulsion that made her palpitate, and even shook her hair and her lips with a nervous shudder.

"I dared not tell you," he said, "that between me and the Unconditioned, the Absolute, scarcely a hair's breadth intervenes. To gasify metals, I only need to find the means of submitting them to intense heat in some centre where the pressure of the atmosphere is nil, — in short, in a vacuum."

Madame Claës could not endure the egotism of this reply. She expected a passionate acknowledgment of her sacrifices — she received a problem in chemistry! The poor woman left her husband abruptly and returned to the parlor, where she fell into a chair between her frightened daughters, and burst into tears. Marguerite and Félicie took her hands, kneeling one on each side of her, not knowing the cause of her grief, and asking at intervals, "Mother, what is it?"

"My poor children, I am dying; I feel it."

The answer struck home to Marguerite's heart; she saw, for the first time on her mother's face, the signs of that peculiar pallor which only comes on olive-tinted skins.

"Martha, Martha!" cried Félicie, "come quickly; mamma wants you."

The old duenna ran in from the kitchen, and as soon as she saw the livid hue of the dusky skin usually high-colored, she cried out in Spanish, —

"Body of Christ! madame is dying!"

Then she rushed precipitately back, told Josette to heat water for a footbath, and returned to the parlor.

"Don't alarm Monsieur Claës; say nothing to him, Martha," said her mistress. "My poor dear girls," she added, pressing Marguerite and Félicie to her heart with a despairing action; "I wish I could live long enough to see you married and happy. Martha," she continued, "tell Lemulquinier to go to Monsieur de Solis and ask him in my name to come here."

The shock of this attack extended to the kitchen. Josette and Martha, both devoted to Madame Claës and her daughters, felt the blow in their own affections. Martha's dreadful announcement, — "Madame is dying; monsieur must have killed her; get ready a mustard-bath," — forced certain exclamations from Josette, which she launched at Lemulquinier. He, cold and impassive, went on eating at the corner of a table before one of the windows of the kitchen, where all was kept as clean as the boudoir of a fine lady.

"I knew how it would end," said Josette, glancing at the valet and mounting a stool to take down a copper kettle that shone like gold. "There's no mother could quietly stand by and see a father amusing himself by chopping up a fortune like his into sausage-meat."

Josette, whose head was covered by a round cap with crimped borders, which made it look like a German nut-cracker, cast a sour look at Lemulquinier, which the greenish tinge of her prominent little eyes made almost venomous. The old valet shrugged his shoulders with a motion worthy of Mirabeau when irritated; then he filled his large mouth with bread and butter sprinkled with chopped onion.

"Instead of thwarting monsieur, madame ought to give him more money," he said; "and then we should soon be rich enough to swim in gold. There 's not the thickness of a farthing between us and — "

"Well, you 've got twenty thousand francs laid by; why don't you give 'em to monsieur? he 's your master, and if you are so sure of his doings — "

"You don't know anything about them, Josette. Mind your pots and pans, and heat the water," remarked the old Fleming, interrupting the cook.

"I know enough to know there used to be several thousand ounces of silver-ware about this house which you and your master have melted up; and if you are allowed to have your way, you 'll make ducks and drakes of everything till there 's nothing left."

"And monsieur," added Martha, entering the kitchen, "will kill madame, just to get rid of a woman who restrains him and won't let him swallow up everything he 's got. He 's possessed by the devil; anybody can see that. You don't risk your soul in helping him, Mulquinier, because you have n't got any; look at you! sitting there like a bit of ice when we are all in such distress; the young ladies are crying like two Magdalens. Go and fetch Monsieur l'Abbé de Solis."

"I've got something to do for monsieur. He told me to put the laboratory in order," said the valet. "Besides, it's too far — go yourself."

"Just hear the brute!" cried Martha. "Pray who is to give madame her foot-bath? do you want her to die? she has got a rush of blood to the head."

"Mulquinier," said Marguerite, coming into the servants' hall, which adjoined the kitchen, "on your way back from Monsieur de Solis, call at Dr. Pierquin's house and ask him to come here at once."

"Ha! you've got to go now," said Josette.

"Mademoiselle, monsieur told me to put the laboratory in order," said Lemulquinier, facing the two women and looking them down, with a despotic air.

"Father," said Marguerite, to Monsieur Claës, who was just then descending the stairs, "can you let Mulquinier do an errand for us in town?"

"Now you're forced to go, you old barbarian!" cried Martha, as she heard Monsieur Claës put Mulquinier at his daughter's bidding.

The lack of good-will and devotion shown by the old valet for the family whom he served was a fruitful cause of quarrel between the two women and Lemulquinier, whose cold-heartedness had the effect of increasing the loyal attachment of Josette and the old duenna.

This dispute, apparently so paltry, was destined to influence the future of the Claës family when, at a later period, they needed succor in misfortune.

VIII.

Balthazar was again so absorbed that he did not notice Joséphine's condition. He took Jean upon his knee and trotted him mechanically, pondering, no doubt, the problem he now had the means of solving. He saw them bring the footbath to his wife, who was still in the parlor, too weak to rise from the low chair in which she was lying; he gazed abstractedly at his daughters now attending on their mother, without inquiring the cause of their tender solicitude. When Marguerite or Jean attempted to speak aloud, Madame Claës hushed them and pointed to Balthazar. Such a scene was of a nature to make a young girl think; and Marguerite, placed as she was between her father and mother, was old enough and sensible enough to weigh their conduct.

There comes a moment in the private life of every family when the children, voluntarily or involuntarily, judge their parents. Madame Claës foresaw the dangers of that moment. Her love for Balthazar impelled her to justify in Marguerite's eyes conduct that might, to the upright mind of a girl of sixteen, seem faulty in a father. The very respect which she showed at this moment for her husband, making herself and her condition of no account that nothing might disturb his meditation, impressed her children with a sort of awe of the paternal majesty. Such self-devotion, however infectious it might be, only increased Marguerite's admiration for her mother, to whom she was more particularly bound by the close intimacy of their daily lives. This feeling was based on the intuitive perception of sufferings whose causes naturally occupied the young girl's mind. No human power could have hindered some chance word dropped by Martha, or by Josette, from enlightening her as to the real reasons for the condition of her home during the last four years. Notwithstanding Madame Claës's reserve, Marguerite discovered slowly, thread by thread, the clue to the domestic drama. She was soon to be her mother's active confidante, and later, under other circumstances, a formidable judge.

Madame Claës's watchful care now centred upon her eldest daughter, to whom she endeavored to communicate her own self-devotion towards Balthazar. The firmness and sound judgment which she recognized in the young girl made her tremble at the thought of a possible struggle between father and daughter whenever her own death should make the latter mistress of the household. The poor woman had reached a point where she dreaded the consequences of her death far more than death itself. Her tender solicitude for Balthazar showed itself in the resolution she had this day taken. By freeing his property from incumbrance she secured his independence, and prevented all future disputes by separating his interests from those of her children. She hoped to see him happy until she closed her eyes on earth, and she studied to transmit the tenderness of her own heart to that of Marguerite, trusting that his daughter might continue to be to him an angel of love, while exercising over the family a protecting and conservative authority. Might she not thus shed the light of her love upon her dear ones from beyond the grave? Nevertheless, she was not willing to lower the father in the eyes of his daughter by initiating her into the secret dangers of his scientific passion before it became necessary to do so. She studied Marguerite's soul and character, seeking to discover if the girl's own nature would lead her to be a mother to her brothers and her sister, and a tender, gentle helpmeet to her father.

Madame Claës's last days were thus embittered by fears and mental disquietudes which she dared not confide to others. Conscious that the recent scene had struck her death-blow, she turned her thoughts wholly to the future. Balthazar, meanwhile, now permanently unfitted for the care of property or the interests of domestic life, thought only of the Absolute.

The heavy silence that reigned in the parlor was broken only by the monotonous beating of Balthazar's foot, which he continued to trot, wholly unaware that Jean had slid from his knee. Marguerite, who was sitting beside her mother and watching the changes on that pallid, convulsed face, turned now and again to her father, wondering at his indifference. Presently the street-door clanged, and the family saw the Abbé de Solis leaning on the arm of his nephew and slowly crossing the court-yard.

"Ah! there is Monsieur Emmanuel," said Félicie.

"That good young man!" exclaimed Madame Claës; "I am glad to welcome him."

Marguerite blushed at the praise that escaped her mother's lips. For the last two days a remembrance of the young man had stirred mysterious feelings in her heart, and wakened in her mind thoughts that had lain dormant. During the visit made by the Abbé de Solis to Madame Claës on the occasion of his examining the pictures, there happened certain of those imperceptible events which wield so great an influence upon life; and their results were sufficiently important to necessitate a brief sketch of the two personages now first introduced into the history of this family.

It was a matter of principle with Madame Claës to perform the duties of her religion privately. Her confessor, who was almost unknown in the family, now entered the house for the second time only; but there, as elsewhere, every one was impressed with a sort of tender admiration at the aspect of the uncle and his nephew.

The Abbé de Solis was an octogenarian, with silvery hair, and a withered face from which the vitality seemed to have retreated to the eyes. He walked with difficulty, for one of his shrunken legs ended in a painfully deformed foot, which was cased in a species of velvet bag, and obliged him to use a crutch when the arm of his nephew was not at hand. His bent figure and decrepit body conveyed the impression of a delicate, suffering nature, governed by a will of iron and the spirit of religious purity. This Spanish priest, who was remarkable for his vast learning, his sincere piety, and a wide knowledge of men and things, had been successively a Dominican friar, the *grand pénitencier* of Toledo, and the vicar-general of the archbishopric of Malines. If the French Revolution had not intervened, the influence of the Casa-Réal family would have made him one of the highest dignitaries of the Church; but the grief he felt for the death of the young duke, Madame Claës's brother, who had been his pupil, turned him from active life, and he now devoted himself to the education of his nephew, who was made an orphan at an early age.

After the conquest of Belgium, the Abbé de Solis settled at Douai to be near Madame Claës. From his youth up he had professed an enthusiasm for Saint Theresa which, together with the natural bent of his mind, led him to the mystical side of Christianity. Finding in Flanders, where Mademoiselle Bourignon and the writings of the Quietists and Illuminati made the greatest number of proselytes, a flock of Catholics devoted to those ideas, he remained there, — all the more willingly because he was looked up to as a patriarch by this particular communion, which continued to follow the doctrines of the Mystics notwithstanding the censures of the Church upon Fénelon and Madame Guyon. His morals were rigid, his life exemplary, and he was believed to have visions. In spite of his own detachment from the things of life, his affection for his nephew made him careful of the young man's interests. When a work of charity was to be done, the old abbé put the faithful of his flock under contribution before having recourse to his own means; and his patriarchal authority was so well established, his motives so pure, his discernment so rarely at fault, that every one was ready to answer his appeal. To give an idea of the contrast between the uncle and the nephew, we may compare the old man to a willow on the borders of a stream, hollowed to a skeleton and barely alive, and the young man to a sweet-brier clustering with roses, whose erect and graceful stems spring up about the hoary trunk of the old tree as if they would support it.

Emmanuel de Solis, rigidly brought up by his uncle, who kept him at his side as a mother keeps her daughter, was full of delicate sensibility, of half-dreamy innocence, — those fleeting flowers of youth which bloom perennially in souls that are nourished on religious principles. The old priest had checked all sensuous emotions in his pupil, preparing him for the trials of life by constant study and a discipline that was almost cloisteral. Such an education, which would launch the youth unstained upon the world and render him happy, provided he were fortunate in his earliest affections, had endowed him with a purity of spirit which gave to his person something of the charm that surrounds a maiden. His modest eyes, veiling a strong and courageous soul, sent forth a light that vibrated in the soul as the tones of a crystal bell sound their undulations on the ear. His face, though regular, was expressive, and charmed the eye with its clear-cut outline, the harmony of its lines, and the perfect repose which came of a heart at peace. All was harmonious. His black hair, his brown eyes and eyebrows, heightened the effect of a white skin and a brilliant color. His voice was such as might have been expected from his beautiful face; and something feminine in his movements accorded well with the melody of its tones and with the tender brightness of his eyes. He seemed unaware of the charm he exercised by his modest silence, the half-melancholy reserve of his manner, and the respectful attentions he paid to his uncle.

Those who saw the young man as he watched the uncertain steps of the old abbé, and altered his own to suit their devious course, looking for obstructions that might trip his uncle's feet and guiding him to a smoother way, could not fail to recognize in Emmanuel de Solis the generous nature which makes the human being a divine creation. There was something noble in the love that never criticised his uncle, in the obedience that never cavilled at the old man's orders; it seemed as though there were prophecy in the gracious name his godmother had given him. When the abbé gave proof of his Dominican despotism, in their own home or in the presence of others, Emmanuel would sometimes lift his head with so much dignity, as if to assert his metal should any other man assail him, that men of honor were moved at the sight like artists before a glorious picture; for noble sentiments ring as loudly in the soul from living incarnations as from the imagery of art.

Emmanuel had accompanied his uncle when the latter came to examine the pictures of the House of Claës. Hearing from Martha that the Abbé de Solis was in the gallery, Marguerite, anxious to see so celebrated a man, invented an excuse to join her mother and gratify her curiosity. Entering hastily, with the heedless gayety young girls assume at times to hide their wishes, she encountered near the old abbé, clothed in black and looking decrepit and cadaverous, the fresh, delightful face of a young man. The naïve glances of the youthful pair expressed their mutual astonishment. Marguerite and Emmanuel had no doubt seen each other in their dreams. Both lowered their eyes and raised them again with one impulse; each, by the action, made the same avowal. Marguerite took her mother's arm, and spoke to her to cover her confusion and find shelter under the maternal wing, turning her neck with a swan-like motion to keep sight of Emmanuel, who still supported his uncle on his arm. The light was cleverly arranged to give due value to the pictures, and the half-obscurity of the gallery encouraged those furtive glances which are the joy of timid natures. Neither went so far, even in thought, as the first note of love; yet both felt the mysterious trouble which stirs the heart, and is jealously kept secret in our youth from fastidiousness or modesty.

The first impression which forces a sensibility hitherto suppressed to overflow its borders, is followed in all young people by the same half-stupefied amazement which the first sounds of music produce upon a child. Some children laugh and think; others do not laugh till they have thought; but those whose hearts are called to live by poetry or love, listen stilly and hear the melody with a look where pleasure flames already, and the search for the infinite begins. If, from an irresistible feeling, we love the places where our childhood first perceived the beauties of harmony, if we remember with delight the musician, and even the instrument, that taught them to us, how much more shall we love the being who reveals to us the music of life? The first heart in which we draw the breath of love, — is it not our home, our native land? Marguerite and Emmanuel were, each to each, that Voice of music which wakes a sense, that hand which lifts the misty veil, and reveals the distant shores bathed in the fires of noonday.

When Madame Claës paused before a picture by Guido representing an angel, Marguerite bent forward to see the impression it made upon Emmanuel, and Emmanuel looked at Marguerite to compare the mute thought on the canvas with the living thought beside him. This involuntary and delightful homage was understood and treasured. The old abbé gravely praised the picture, and Madame Claës answered him, but the youth and the maiden were silent.

Such was their first meeting: the mysterious light of the picture gallery, the stillness of the old house, the presence of their elders, all contributed to trace upon their hearts the delicate lines of this vaporous mirage. The many confused thoughts that surged in Marguerite's mind grew calm and lay like a limpid ocean traversed by a luminous ray when Emmanuel murmured a few farewell words to Madame Claës. That voice, whose fresh and mellow tone sent nameless delights into her heart, completed the revelation that had come to her, — a revelation which Emmanuel, were he able, should cherish to his own profit; for it often happens that the man whom destiny employs to waken love in the heart of a young girl is ignorant of his work and leaves it unfinished. Marguerite bowed confusedly; her true farewell was in the glance which seemed unwilling to lose so pure and lovely a vision. Like a child she wanted her melody. Their parting took place at the foot of the old staircase near the parlor; and when Marguerite re-entered the room she watched the uncle and the nephew till the street-door closed upon them.

Madame Claës had been so occupied with the serious matters which caused her conference with the abbé that she did not on this occasion observe her daughter's manner. When Monsieur de Solis came again to the house on the occasion of her illness, she was too violently agitated to notice the color that rushed into Marguerite's face and betrayed the tumult of a virgin heart conscious of its first joy. By the time the old abbé was announced, Marguerite had taken up her sewing and appeared to give it such attention that she bowed to the uncle and nephew without looking at them. Monsieur

Claës mechanically returned their salutation and left the room with the air of a man called away by his occupations. The good Dominican sat down beside Madame Claës and looked at her with one of those searching glances by which he penetrated the minds of others; the sight of Monsieur Claës and his wife was enough to make him aware of a catastrophe.

"My children," said the mother, "go into the garden; Marguerite, show Emmanuel your father's tulips."

Marguerite, half abashed, took Félicie's arm and looked at the young man, who blushed and caught up little Jean to cover his confusion. When all four were in the garden, Félicie and Jean ran to the other side, leaving Marguerite, who, conscious that she was alone with young de Solis, led him to the pyramid of tulips, arranged precisely in the same manner year after year by Lemulquinier.

"Do you love tulips?" asked Marguerite, after standing for a moment in deep silence, — a silence Emmanuel seemed little disposed to break.

"Mademoiselle, these flowers are beautiful, but to love them we must perhaps have a taste for them, and know how to understand their beauties. They dazzle me. Constant study in the gloomy little chamber in which I live, close to my uncle, makes me prefer those flowers that are softer to the eye."

Saying these words he glanced at Marguerite; but the look, full as it was of confused desires, contained no allusion to the lily whiteness, the sweet serenity, the tender coloring which made her face a flower.

"Do you work very hard?" she asked, leading him to a wooden seat with a back, painted green. "Here," she continued, "the tulips are not so close; they will not tire your eyes. Yes, you are right, those colors are dazzling; they give pain."

"Do I work hard?" replied the young man after a short silence, as he smoothed the gravel with his foot. "Yes; I work at many things. My uncle wished to make me a priest."

"Oh!" exclaimed Marguerite, naïvely.

"I resisted; I felt no vocation for it. But it required great courage to oppose my uncle's wishes. He is so good, he loves me so much! Quite recently he bought a substitute to save me from the conscription — me, a poor orphan!"

"What do you mean to be?" asked Marguerite; then, immediately checking herself as though she would unsay the words, she added with a pretty gesture, "I beg your pardon; you must think me very inquisitive."

"Oh, mademoiselle," said Emmanuel, looking at her with tender admiration, "except my uncle, no one ever asked me that question. I am studying to be a teacher. I cannot do otherwise; I am not rich. If

I were principal of a college-school in Flanders I should earn enough to live moderately, and I might marry some simple woman whom I could love. That is the life I look forward to. Perhaps that is why I prefer a daisy in the meadows to these splendid tulips, whose purple and gold and rubies and amethysts betoken a life of luxury, just as the daisy is emblematic of a sweet and patriarchal life, — the life of a poor teacher like me."

"I have always called the daisies marguerites," she said.

Emmanuel colored deeply and sought an answer from the sand at his feet. Embarrassed to choose among the thoughts that came to him, which he feared were silly, and disconcerted by his delay in answering, he said at last, "I dared not pronounce your name" — then he paused.

"A teacher?" she said.

"Mademoiselle, I shall be a teacher only as a means of living: I shall undertake great works which will make me nobly useful. I have a strong taste for historical researches."

"Ah!"

That "ah!" so full of secret thoughts added to his confusion; he gave a foolish laugh and said: —

"You make me talk of myself when I ought only to speak of you."

"My mother and your uncle must have finished their conversation, I think," said Marguerite, looking into the parlor through the windows.

"Your mother seems to me greatly changed," said Emmanuel.

"She suffers, but she will not tell us the cause of her sufferings; and we can only try to share them with her."

Madame Claës had, in fact, just ended a delicate consultation which involved a case of conscience the Abbé de Solis alone could decide. Foreseeing the utter ruin of the family, she wished to retain, unknown to Balthazar who paid no attention to his business affairs, part of the price of the pictures which Monsieur de Solis had undertaken to sell in Holland, intending to hold it secretly in reserve against the day when poverty should overtake her children. With much deliberation, and after weighing every circumstance, the old Dominican approved the act as one of prudence. He took his leave to prepare at once for the sale, which he engaged to make secretly, so as not to injure Monsieur Claës in the estimation of others.

The next day Monsieur de Solis despatched his nephew, armed with letters of introduction, to Amsterdam, where Emmanuel, delighted to do a service to the Claës family, succeeded in selling all the pictures in the gallery to the noted bankers Happe and Duncker for the ostensible sum of eighty-five thousand Dutch ducats and fifteen thousand more which were paid over secretly to Madame Claës. The pictures were so well known that nothing was needed to complete the sale but an answer from Balthazar to the letter which Messieurs Happe and Duncker addressed to him. Emmanuel de Solis was commissioned by Claës to receive the price of the pictures, which were thereupon packed and sent away secretly, to conceal the sale from the people of Douai.

Towards the end of September, Balthazar paid off all the sums that he had borrowed, released his property from encumbrance, and resumed his chemical researches; but the House of Claës was deprived of its noblest ornament. Blinded by his passion, the master showed no regret; he felt so sure of repairing the loss that in selling the pictures he reserved a right of redemption. In Joséphine's eyes a hundred pictures were as nothing compared to domestic happiness and the satisfaction of her husband's mind; moreover, she refilled the gallery with other paintings, taken from the reception-rooms, and to conceal the gaps which these left in the front house, she changed the arrangement of the furniture.

When Balthazar's debts were all paid he had about two hundred thousand francs with which to carry on his experiments. The Abbé de Solis and his nephew took charge secretly of the fifteen thousand ducats reserved by Madame Claës. To increase that sum, the abbé sold the Dutch ducats, to which the events of the Continental war had given a commercial value. One hundred and sixty-five thousand francs were buried in the cellar of the house in which the abbé and his nephew resided.

Madame Claës had the melancholy happiness of seeing her husband incessantly busy and satisfied for nearly eight months. But the shock he had lately given her was too severe; she sank into a state of languor and debility which steadily increased. Balthazar was now so completely absorbed in science that neither the reverses which had overtaken France, nor the first fall of Napoleon, nor the return of the Bourbons, drew him from his laboratory; he was neither husband, father, nor citizen, — solely chemist.

Towards the close of 1814 Madame Claës declined so rapidly that she was no longer able to leave her bed. Unwilling to vegetate in her own chamber, the scene of so much happiness, where the memory of vanished joys forced involuntary comparisons with the present and depressed her, she moved into the parlor. The doctors encouraged this wish by declaring the room more airy, more cheerful, and therefore better suited to her condition. The bed in which the unfortunate woman ended her life was placed between the fireplace and a window looking on the garden. There she passed her last days, sacredly occupied in training the souls of her young daughters, striving to leave within them the fire of her own. Conjugal love, deprived of its manifestations, allowed maternal love to have its way. The mother now seemed the more delightful because her motherhood had blossomed late. Like all generous persons, she passed through sensitive phases of feeling which she mistook for remorse. Believing that she had defrauded her children of the tenderness that should have been theirs, she sought to redeem those imaginary wrongs; bestowing attentions and tender cares which made her precious to them; she longed to make her children live, as it were, within her heart; to shelter them beneath her feeble wings; to cherish them enough in the few remaining days to redeem the time during which she had neglected them. The sufferings of her mind gave to her words and her caresses a glowing warmth that issued from her soul. Her eyes caressed her children, her voice with its yearning intonations touched their hearts, her hand showered blessings on their heads.

IX.

The good people of Douai were not surprised that visitors were no longer received at the House of Claës, and that Balthazar gave no more fêtes on the anniversary of his marriage. Madame Claës's state of health seemed a sufficient reason for the change, and the payment of her husband's debts put a stop to the current gossip; moreover, the political vicissitudes to which Flanders was subjected, the war of the Hundred-days, and the occupation of the Allied armies, put the chemist and his researches completely out of people's minds. During those two years Douai was so often on the point of being taken, it was so constantly occupied either by the French or by the enemy, so many foreigners came there, so many of the country-people sought refuge within its walls, so many lives were in peril, so many catastrophes occurred, that each man thought only of himself.

The Abbé de Solis and his nephew, and the two Pierquins, doctor and lawyer, were the only persons who now visited Madame Claës; for whom the winter of 1814–1815 was a long and dreary death-scene. Her husband rarely came to see her. It is true that after dinner he remained some hours in the parlor, near her bed; but as she no longer had the strength to keep up a conversation, he merely said a few words, invariably the same, sat down, spoke no more, and a dreary silence settled down upon the room. The monotony of this existence was broken only on the days when the Abbé de Solis and his nephew passed the evening with Madame Claës.

While the abbé played backgammon with Balthazar, Marguerite talked with Emmanuel by the bedside of her mother, who smiled at their innocent joy, not allowing them to see how painful and yet how soothing to her wounded spirit were the fresh breezes of their virgin love, murmuring in fitful words from heart to heart. The inflection of their voices, to them so full of charm, to her was heart-breaking; a glance of mutual understanding surprised between the two threw her, half-dead as she was, back to the young and happy past which gave such bitterness to the present. Emmanuel and Marguerite with intuitive delicacy of feeling repressed the sweet half-childish play of love, lest it should hurt the saddened woman whose wounds they instinctively divined.

No one has yet remarked that feelings have an existence of their own, a nature which is developed by the circumstances that environ them, and in which they are born; they bear a likeness to the places of their growth, and keep the imprint of the ideas that influenced their development. There are passions ardently conceived which remain ardent, like that of Madame Claës for her husband: there are sentiments on which all life has smiled; these retain their spring-time gayety, their harvest-time of joy, seasons that never fail of laughter or of fêtes: but there are other loves, framed in melancholy, circled by distress, whose pleasures are painful, costly, burdened by fears, poisoned by remorse, or blackened by despair. The love in the heart of Marguerite and Emmanuel, as yet unknown to them for love, the sentiment that budded into life beneath the gloomy arches of the picture-gallery, beside the stern old abbé, in a still and silent moment, that love so grave and so discreet, yet rich in tender depths, in secret delights that were luscious to the taste as stolen grapes snatched from a corner of the vineyard, wore in coming years the sombre browns and grays that surrounded the hour of its birth.

Fearing to give expression to their feelings beside that bed of pain, they unconsciously increased their happiness by a concentration which deepened its imprint on their hearts. The devotion of the daughter, shared by Emmanuel, happy in thus uniting himself with Marguerite and becoming by anticipation the son of her mother, was their medium of communication. Melancholy thanks from the lips of the young girl supplanted the honeyed language of lovers; the sighing of their hearts, surcharged with joy at some interchange of looks, was scarcely distinguishable from the sighs wrung from them by the mother's sufferings. Their happy little moments of indirect avowal, of unuttered promises, of smothered effusion, were like the allegories of Raphael painted on a black ground. Each felt a certainty that neither avowed; they knew the sun was shining over them, but they could not know what wind might chase away the clouds that gathered about their heads. They doubted the future; fearing that pain would ever follow them, they stayed timidly among the shadows of the twilight, not daring to say to each other, "Shall we end our days together?"

The tenderness which Madame Claës now testified for her children nobly concealed much that she endeavored to hide from herself. Her children caused her neither fear nor passionate emotion: they were her comforters, but they were not her life: she lived by them; she died through Balthazar. However painful her husband's presence might be to her, lost as he was for hours together in depths of thought from which he looked at her without seeing her, it was only during those cruel moments that she forgot her griefs. His indifference to the dying woman would have seemed criminal to a stranger, but Madame Claës and her daughters were accustomed to it; they knew his heart and they forgave him. If, during the daytime, Joséphine was seized by some sudden illness, if she were worse and seemed near dying, Claës was the only person in the house or in the town who remained ignorant of it. Lemulquinier knew it, but neither the daughters, bound to silence by their mother, nor Joséphine herself let Balthazar know the danger of the being he had once so passionately loved.

When his heavy step sounded in the gallery as he came to dinner, Madame Claës was happy — she was about to see him! and she gathered up her strength for that happiness. As he entered, the pallid face blushed brightly and recovered for an instant the semblance of health. Balthazar came to her bedside, took her hand, saw the misleading color on her cheek, and to him she seemed well. When he asked, "My dear wife, how are you to-day?" she answered, "Better, dear friend," and made him think she would be up and recovered on the morrow. His preoccupation was so great that he accepted this reply, and believed the illness of which his wife was dying a mere indisposition. Dying to the eyes of the world, in his alone she was living.

A complete separation between husband and wife was the result of this year. Claës slept in a distant chamber, got up early in the morning, and shut himself into his laboratory or his study. Seeing his wife only in presence of his daughters or of the two or three friends who came to visit them, he lost the habit of communicating with her. These two beings, formerly accustomed to think as one, no longer, unless at rare intervals, enjoyed those moments of communion, of passionate unreserve which feed the life of the heart; and finally there came a time when even these rare pleasures ceased. Physical suffering was now a boon to the poor woman, helping her to endure the void of separation, which might have killed her had she been truly living. Her bodily pain became so great that there were times when she was joyful in the thought that he whom she loved was not a witness of it. She lay watching Balthazar in the evening hours, and knowing him happy in his own way, she lived in the happiness she had procured for him, — a shadowy joy, and yet it satisfied her. She no longer asked herself if she were loved, she forced herself to believe it; and she glided over that icy surface, not daring to rest her weight upon it lest it should break and drown her soul in a gulf of awful nothingness.

No events stirred the calm of this existence; the malady that was slowly consuming Madame Claës added to the household stillness, and in this condition of passive gloom the House of Claës reached the first weeks of the year 1816. Pierquin, the lawyer, was destined, at the close of February, to strike the death-blow of the angelic woman who, in the words of the Abbé de Solis, was wellnigh without sin.

"Madame," said Pierquin, seizing a moment when her daughters could not hear the conversation, "Monsieur Claës has directed me to borrow three hundred thousand francs on his property. You must do something to protect the future of your children."

Madame Claës clasped her hands and raised her eyes to the ceiling; then she thanked the notary with a sad smile and a kindly motion of her head which affected him.

His words were the stab that killed her. During that day she had yielded herself up to sad reflections which swelled her heart; she was like the wayfarer walking beside a precipice who loses his balance and a mere pebble rolls him to the depth of the abyss he has so long and so courageously skirted. When the notary left her, Madame Claës told Marguerite to bring writing materials; then she gathered up her remaining strength to write her last wishes. Several times she paused and looked at her daughter. The hour of confidence had come.

Marguerite's management of the household since her mother's illness had so amply fulfilled the dying woman's hopes that Madame Claës was able to look upon the future of the family without absolute despair, confident that she herself would live again in this strong and loving angel. Both women felt, no doubt, that sad and mutual confidences must be now made between them; the daughter looked at the mother, the mother at the daughter, tears flowing from their eyes. Several times, as Madame Claës rested from her writing, Marguerite said: "Mother?" then she stopped as if choking; but the mother, occupied with her last thoughts, did not ask the meaning of the interrogation. At last, Madame Claës wished to seal the letter; Marguerite held the taper, turning aside her head that she might not see the superscription.

"You can read it, my child," said the mother, in a heart-rending voice.

The young girl read the words, "To my daughter Marguerite."

"We will talk to each other after I have rested awhile," said Madame Claës, putting the letter under her pillow.

Then she fell back as if exhausted by the effort, and slept for several hours. When she woke, her two daughters and her two sons were kneeling by her bed and praying. It was Thursday. Gabriel and Jean had been brought from school by Emmanuel de Solis, who for the last six months was professor of history and philosophy.

"Dear children, we must part!" she cried. "You have never forsaken me, never! and he who —"

She stopped.

"Monsieur Emmanuel," said Marguerite, seeing the pallor on her mother's face, "go to my father, and tell him mamma is worse."

Young de Solis went to the door of the laboratory and persuaded Lemulquinier to make Balthazar come and speak to him. On hearing the urgent request of the young man, Claës answered, "I will come."

"Emmanuel," said Madame Claës when he returned to her, "take my sons away, and bring your uncle here. It is time to give me the last sacraments, and I wish to receive them from his hand."

When she was alone with her daughters she made a sign to Marguerite, who understood her and sent Félicie away.

"I have something to say to you myself, dear mamma," said Marguerite who, not believing her mother so ill as she really was, increased the wound Pierquin had given. "I have had no money for the household expenses during the last ten days; I owe six months' wages to the servants. Twice I have tried to ask my father for money, but did not dare to do so. You don't know, perhaps, that all the pictures in the gallery have been sold, and all the wines in the cellar?"

"He never told me!" exclaimed Madame Claës. "My God! thou callest me to thyself in time! My poor children! what will become of them?"

She made a fervent prayer, which brought the fires of repentance to her eyes.

"Marguerite," she resumed, drawing the letter from her pillow, "here is a paper which you must not open or read until a time, after my death, when some great disaster has overtaken you; when, in short, you are without the means of living. My dear Marguerite, love your father, but take care of your brothers and your sister. In a few days, in a few hours perhaps, you will be the head of this household. Be economical. Should you find yourself opposed to the wishes of your father, — and it may so happen, because he has spent vast sums in searching for a secret whose discovery is to bring glory and wealth to his family, and he will no doubt need money, perhaps he may demand it of you,— should that time come, treat him with the tenderness of a daughter, strive to reconcile the interests of which you will be the sole protector with the duty which you owe to a father, to a great man who has sacrificed his happiness and his life to the glory of his family; he can only do wrong in act, his intentions are noble, his heart is full of love; you will see him once more kind and affectionate — *You!* Marguerite, it is my duty to say these words to you on the borders of the grave. If you wish to soften the anguish of my death, promise me, my child, to take my place beside your father; to cause him no grief; never to reproach him; never to condemn him. Be a gentle, considerate guardian of the home until — his work accomplished — he is again the master of his family."

"I understand you, dear mother," said Marguerite, kissing the swollen eyelids of the dying woman. "I will do as you wish."

"Do not marry, my darling, until Gabriel can succeed you in the management of the property and the household. If you married, your husband might not share your feelings, he might bring trouble into the family and disturb your father's life."

Marguerite looked at her mother and said, "Have you nothing else to say to me about my marriage?"

"Can you hesitate, my child?" cried the dying woman in alarm.

"No," the daughter answered; "I promise to obey you."

"Poor girl! I did not sacrifice myself for you," said the mother, shedding hot tears. "Yet I ask you to sacrifice yourself for all. Happiness makes us selfish. Yes, Marguerite, I have been weak because I was happy. Be strong; preserve your own good sense to guard others who as yet have none. Act so that your brothers and your sister may not reproach my memory. Love your father, and do not oppose him — too much."

She laid her head on her pillow and said no more; her strength was gone; the inward struggle between the Wife and the Mother had been too violent.

A few moments later the clergy came, preceded by the Abbé de Solis, and the parlor was filled by the children and the household. When the ceremony was about to begin, Madame Claës, awakened by her confessor, looked about her and not seeing Balthazar said quickly, —

"Where is my husband?"

The words — summing up, as it were, her life and her death — were uttered in such lamentable tones that all present shuddered. Martha, in spite of her great age, darted out of the room, ran up the staircase and through the gallery, and knocked loudly on the door of the laboratory.

"Monsieur, madame is dying; they are waiting for you, to administer the last sacraments," she cried with the violence of indignation.

"I am coming," answered Balthazar.

Lemulquinier came down a moment later, and said his master was following him. Madame Claës's eyes never left the parlor door, but her husband did not appear until the ceremony was over. When at last he entered, Joséphine colored and a few tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Were you trying to decompose nitrogen?" she said to him with an angelic tenderness which made the spectators quiver.

"I have done it!" he cried joyfully; "Nitrogen contains oxygen and a substance of the nature of imponderable matter, which is apparently the principle of —"

A murmur of horror interrupted his words and brought him to his senses.

"What did they tell me?" he demanded. "Are you worse? What is the matter?"

"This is the matter, monsieur," whispered the Abbé de Solis, indignant at his conduct; "your wife is dying, and you have killed her."

Without waiting for an answer the abbé took the arm of his nephew and went out followed by the family, who accompanied him to the court-yard. Balthazar stood as if thunderstruck; he looked at his wife, and a few tears dropped from his eyes.

"You are dying, and I have killed you!" he said. "What does he mean?"

"My husband," she answered, "I only lived in your love, and you have taken my life away from me; but you knew not what you did."

"Leave us," said Claës to his children, who now re-entered the room. "Have I for one moment ceased to love you?" he went on, sitting down beside his wife, and taking her hands and kissing them.

"My friend, I do not blame you. You made me happy — too happy, for I have not been able to bear the contrast between our early married life, so full of joy, and these last days, so desolate, so empty, when you are not yourself. The life of the heart, like the life of the body, has its functions. For six years you have been dead to love, to the family, to all that was once our happiness. I will not speak of our early married days; such joys must cease in the after-time of life, but they ripen into fruits which feed the soul, — confidence unlimited, the tender habits of affection: you have torn those treasures from me! I go in time: we live together no longer; you hide your thoughts and actions from me. How is it that you fear me? Have I ever given you one word, one look, one gesture of reproach? And yet, you have sold your last pictures, you have sold even the wine in your cellar, you are borrowing money on your property, and have said no word to me. Ah! I go from life weary of life. If you are doing wrong, if you delude yourself in following the unattainable, have I not shown you that my love could share your faults, could walk beside you and be happy, though you led me in the paths of crime? You loved me too well, — that was my glory; it is now my death. Balthazar, my illness has lasted long; it began on the day when here, in this place where I am about to die, you showed me that Science was more to you than Family. And now the end has come; your wife is dying, and your fortune lost. Fortune and wife were yours, — you could do what you willed with your own; but on the day of my death my property goes to my children, and you cannot touch it; what will then become of you? I am telling you the truth; I owe it to you. Dying eyes see far: when I am gone will anything outweigh that cursed passion which is now your life? If you have sacrificed your wife, your children will count but little in the scale; for I must be just and own you loved me above all. Two millions and six years of toil you have cast into the gulf, — and what have you found?"

At these words Claës grasped his whitened head in his hands and hid his face.

"Humiliation for yourself, misery for your children," continued the dying woman. "You are called in derision 'Claës the alchemist;' soon it will be 'Claës the madman.' For myself, I believe in you. I know you great and wise; I know your genius: but to the vulgar eye genius is mania. Fame is a sun that lights the dead; living, you will be unhappy with the unhappiness of great minds, and your children will be ruined. I go before I see your fame, which might have brought me consolation for my lost happiness. Oh, Balthazar! make my death less bitter to me, let me be certain that my children will not want for bread — Ah, nothing, nothing, not even you, can calm my fears."

"I swear," said Claës, "to —"

"No, do not swear, that you may not fail of your oath," she said, interrupting him. "You owed us your protection; we have been without it seven years. Science is your life. A great man should have neither wife nor children; he should tread alone the path of sacrifice. His virtues are not the virtues of common men; he belongs to the universe, he cannot belong to wife or family; he sucks up the moisture of the earth about him, like a majestic tree — and I, poor plant, I could not rise to the height of your life, I die at its feet. I have waited for this last day to tell you these dreadful thoughts: they came to me in the lightnings of desolation and anguish. Oh, spare my children! let these words echo in your heart. I cry them to you with my last breath. The wife is dead, dead; you have stripped her slowly, gradually, of her feelings, of her joys. Alas! without that cruel care could I have lived so long? But those poor children did not forsake me! they have grown beside my anguish, the mother still survives. Spare them! Spare my children!"

"Lemulquinier!" cried Claës in a voice of thunder.

The old man appeared.

"Go up and destroy all — instruments, apparatus, everything! Be careful, but destroy all. I renounce Science," he said to his wife.

"Too late," she answered, looking at Lemulquinier. "Marguerite!" she cried, feeling herself about to die.

Marguerite came through the doorway and uttered a piercing cry as she saw her mother's eyes now glazing.

"MARGUERITE!" repeated the dying woman.

The exclamation contained so powerful an appeal to her daughter, she invested that appeal with such authority, that the cry was like a dying bequest. The terrified family ran to her side and saw her die; the vital forces were exhausted in that last conversation with her husband.

Balthazar and Marguerite stood motionless, she at the head, he at the foot of the bed, unable to believe in the death of the woman whose virtues and exhaustless tenderness were known fully to them alone. Father and daughter exchanged looks freighted with meaning: the daughter judged the father, and already the father trembled, foreseeing in his daughter an instrument of vengeance. Though memories of the love with which his Pépita had filled his life crowded upon his mind, and gave to her dying words a sacred authority whose voice his soul must ever hear, yet Balthazar knew himself helpless in the grasp of his attendant genius; he heard the terrible mutterings of his passion, denying him the strength to carry his repentance into action: he feared himself.

When the grave had closed upon Madame Claës, one thought filled the minds of all, — the house had had a soul, and that soul was now departed. The grief of the family was so intense that the parlor, where the noble woman still seemed to linger, was closed; no one had the courage to enter it.

X.

Society practises none of the virtues it demands from individuals: every hour it commits crimes, but the crimes are committed in words; it paves the way for evil actions with a jest; it degrades nobility of soul by ridicule; it jeers at sons who mourn their fathers, anathematizes those who do not mourn them enough, and finds diversion (the hypocrite!) in weighing the dead bodies before they are cold.

The evening of the day on which Madame Claës died, her friends cast a few flowers upon her memory in the intervals of their games of whist, doing homage to her noble qualities as they sorted their hearts and spades. Then, after a few lachrymal phrases, — the fi, fo, fum of collective grief, uttered in precisely the same tone, and with neither more nor less of feeling, at all hours and in every town in France, — they proceeded to estimate the value of her property. Pierquin was the first to observe that the death of this excellent woman was a mercy, for her husband had made her unhappy; and it was even more fortunate for her children: she was unable while living to refuse her money to the husband she adored; but now that she was dead, Claës was debarred from touching it. Thereupon all present calculated the fortune of that poor Madame Claës, wondered how much she had laid by (had she, in fact, laid by anything?), made an inventory of her jewels, rummaged in her wardrobe, peeped into her drawers, while the afflicted family were still weeping and praying around her death-bed.

Pierquin, with an appraising eye, stated that Madame Claës's possessions in her own right — to use the notarial phrase — might still be recovered, and ought to amount to nearly a million and a half of francs; basing this estimate partly on the forest of Waignies, — whose timber, counting the full-grown trees, the saplings, the primeval growths, and the recent plantations, had immensely increased in value during the last twelve years, — and partly on Balthazar's own property, of which enough remained to "cover" the claims of his children, if the liquidation of their mother's fortune did not yield sufficient to release him. Mademoiselle Claës was still, in Pierquin's slang, "a four-hundred-thousand-franc girl." "But," he added, "if she does n't marry, — a step which would of course separate her interests and permit us to sell the forest at auction, and so realize the property of the minor children and reinvest it where the father can't lay hands on it, — Claës is likely to ruin them all."

Thereupon, everybody looked about for some eligible young man worthy to win the hand of Mademoiselle Claës; but none of them paid the lawyer the compliment of suggesting that he might be the man. Pierquin, however, found so many good reasons to reject the suggested matches as unworthy of Marguerite's position, that the confabulators glanced at each other and smiled, and took malicious pleasure in prolonging this truly provincial method of annoyance. Pierquin had already decided that Madame Claës's death would have a favorable effect upon his suit, and he began mentally to cut up the body in his own interests.

"That good woman," he said to himself as he went home to bed, "was as proud as a peacock; she would never have given me her daughter. Hey, hey! why could n't I manage matters now so as to marry the girl? Père Claës is drunk on carbon, and takes no care of his children. If, after convincing Marguerite that she must marry to save the property of her brothers and sister, I were to ask him for his daughter, he will be glad to get rid of a girl who is likely to thwart him."

He went to sleep anticipating the charms of the marriage contract, and reflecting on the advantages of the step and the guarantees afforded for his happiness in the person he proposed to marry. In all the provinces there was certainly not a better brought-up or more delicately lovely young girl than Mademoiselle Claës. Her modesty, her grace, were like those of the pretty flower Emmanuel had feared to name lest he should betray the secret of his heart. Her sentiments were lofty, her principles religious, she would undoubtedly make him a a faithful wife: moreover, she not only flattered the vanity which influences every man more or less in the choice of a wife, but she gratified his pride by the high consideration which her family, doubly ennobled, enjoyed in Flanders, — a consideration which her husband of course would share.

The next day Pierquin extracted from his strong-box several thousand-franc notes, which he offered with great friendliness to Balthazar, so as to relieve him of pecuniary annoyance in the midst of his grief. Touched by this delicate attention, Balthazar would, he thought, praise his goodness and his personal qualities to Marguerite. In this he was mistaken. Monsieur Claës and his daughter thought it was a very natural action, and their sorrow was too absorbing to let them even think of the lawyer.

Balthazar's despair was indeed so great that persons who were disposed to blame his conduct could not do otherwise than forgive him, — less on account of the Science which might have excused him, than for the remorse which could not undo his deeds. Society is satisfied by appearances: it takes what it gives, without considering the intrinsic worth of the article. To the world real suffering is a show, a species of enjoyment, which inclines it to absolve even a criminal; in its thirst for emotions it acquits without judging the man who raises a laugh, or he who makes it weep, making no inquiry into their methods.

Marguerite was just nineteen when her father put her in charge of the household; and her brothers and sister, whom Madame Claës in her last moments exhorted to obey their elder sister, accepted her authority with docility. Her mourning attire heightened the dewy whiteness of her skin, just as the sadness of her expression threw into relief the gentleness and patience of her manner. From the first she gave proofs of feminine courage, of inalterable serenity, like that of angels appointed to shed peace on suffering hearts by a touch of their waving palms. But although she trained herself, through a premature perception of duty, to hide her personal grief, it was none the less bitter; her calm exterior was not in keeping with the deep trouble of her thoughts, and she was destined to undergo, too early in life, those terrible outbursts of feeling which no heart is able wholly to subdue: her father was to hold her incessantly under the pressure of natural youthful generosity on the one hand, and the dictates of imperious duty on the other. The cares which came upon her the very day of her mother's death threw her into a struggle with the interests of life at an age when young girls are thinking only of its pleasures. Dreadful discipline of suffering, which is never lacking to angelic natures!

The love which rests on money or on vanity is the most persevering of passions. Pierquin resolved to win the heiress without delay. A few days after Madame Claës's death he took occasion to speak to Marguerite, and began operations with a cleverness which might have succeeded if love had not given her the power of clear insight and saved her from mistaking appearances that were all the more specious because Pierquin displayed his natural kindheartedness, — the kindliness of a notary who thinks himself loving while he protects a client's money. Relying on his rather distant relationship and his constant habit of managing the business and sharing the secrets of the Claës family, sure of the esteem and friendship of the father, greatly assisted by the careless inattention of that servant of science who took no thought for the marriage of his daughter, and not suspecting that Marguerite could prefer another, — Pierquin unguardedly enabled her to form a judgment on a suit in which there was no passion except that of self-interest, always odious to a young soul, and which he was not clever enough to conceal. It was he who on this occasion was naïvely aboveboard, it was she who dissimulated, — simply because he thought he was dealing with a defenceless girl, and wholly misconceived the privileges of weakness.

"My dear cousin," he said to Marguerite, with whom he was walking about the paths of the little garden, "you know my heart, you understand how truly I desire to respect the painful feelings which absorb you at this moment. I have too sensitive a nature for a lawyer; I live by my heart only, I am forced to spend my time on the interests of others when I would fain let myself enjoy the sweet emotions which make life happy. I suffer deeply in being obliged to talk to you of subjects so discordant with your state of mind, but it is necessary. I have thought much about you during the last few days. It is evident that through a fatal delusion the fortune of your brothers and sister and your own are in jeopardy. Do you wish to save your family from complete ruin?"

"What must I do?" she asked, half-frightened by his words.

"Marry," answered Pierquin.

"I shall not marry," she said.

"Yes, you will marry," replied the notary, "when you have soberly thought over the critical position in which you are placed."

"How can my marriage save —"

"Ah! I knew you would consider it, my dear cousin," he exclaimed, interrupting her. "Marriage will emancipate you."

"Why should I be emancipated?" asked Marguerite.

"Because marriage will put you at once into possession of your property, my dear little cousin," said the lawyer in a tone of triumph. "If you marry you take your share of your mother's property. To give it to you, the whole property must be liquidated; to do that, it becomes necessary to sell the forest of Waignies. That done, the proceeds will be capitalized, and your father, as guardian, will be compelled to invest the fortune of his children in such a way that Chemistry can't get hold of it."

"And if I do not marry, what will happen?" she asked.

"Well," said the notary, "your father will manage your estate as he pleases. If he returns to making gold, he will probably sell the timber of the forest of Waignies and leave his children as naked as the little Saint Johns. The forest is now worth about fourteen hundred thousand francs; but from one day to another you are not sure your father won't cut it down, and then your thirteen hundred acres are not worth three hundred thousand francs. Is n't it better to avoid this almost certain danger by at once compelling the division of property on your marriage? If the forest is sold now, while Chemistry has gone to sleep, your father will put the proceeds on the Grand-Livre. The Funds are at 59; those dear children will get nearly five thousand francs a year for every fifty thousand francs: and, inasmuch as the property of minors cannot be sold out, your brothers and sister will find their fortunes doubled in value by the time they come of age. Whereas, in the other case, — faith, no one knows what may happen: your father has already impaired your mother's property; we shall find out the deficit when we come to make the inventory. If he is in debt to her estate, you will take a mortgage on his, and in that way something may be recovered — "

"For shame!" said Marguerite. "It would be an outrage on my father. It is not so long since my mother uttered her last words that I have forgotten them. My father is incapable of robbing his children," she continued, giving way to tears of distress. "You misunderstand him, Monsieur Pierquin."

"But, my dear cousin, if your father gets back to chemistry — "

"We are ruined; is that what you mean?"

"Yes, utterly ruined. Believe me, Marguerite," he said, taking her hand which he placed upon his heart, "I should fail of my duty if I did not persist in this matter. Your interests alone — "

"Monsieur," said Marguerite, coldly withdrawing her hand, "the true interests of my family require me not to marry. My mother thought so."

"Cousin," he cried, with the earnestness of a man who sees a fortune escaping him, "you commit suicide; you fling your mother's property into a gulf. Well, I will prove the devotion I feel for you: you know not how I love you. I have admired you from the day of that last ball, three years ago; you were enchanting. Trust the voice of love when it speaks to you of your own interests, Marguerite." He paused. "Yes, we must call a family council and emancipate you — without consulting you," he added.

"But what is it to be emancipated?"

"It is to enjoy your own rights."

"If I can be emancipated without being married, why do you want me to marry? and whom should I marry?"

Pierquin tried to look tenderly at his cousin, but the expression contrasted so strongly with his hard eyes, usually fixed on money, that Marguerite discovered the self-interest in his improvised tenderness.

"You would marry the person who — pleases you — the most," he said. "A husband is indispensable, were it only as a matter of business. You are now entering upon a struggle with your father; can you resist him all alone?"

"Yes, monsieur; I shall know how to protect my brothers and sister when the time comes."

"Pshaw! the obstinate creature," thought Pierquin. "No, you will not resist him," he said aloud.

"Let us end the subject," she said.

"Adieu, cousin, I shall endeavor to serve you in spite of yourself; I will prove my love by protecting you against your will from a disaster which all the town foresees."

"I thank you for the interest you take in me," she answered; "but I entreat you to propose nothing and to undertake nothing which may give pain to my father."

Marguerite stood thoughtfully watching Pierquin as he departed; she compared his metallic voice, his manners, flexible as a steel spring, his glance, servile rather than tender, with the mute melodious poetry in which Emmanuel's sentiments were wrapped. No matter what may be said, or what may be done, there exists a wonderful magnetism whose effects never deceive. The tones of the voice, the glance, the passionate gestures of a lover may be imitated; a young girl can be deluded by a clever comedian; but to succeed, the man must be alone in the field. If the young girl has another soul beside her whose pulses vibrate in unison with hers, she is able to distinguish the expressions of a true love. Emmanuel, like Marguerite, felt the influence of the clouds which, from the time of their first meeting had gathered ominously about their heads, hiding from their eyes the blue skies of love. His feeling for the Elect of his heart was an idolatry which the total absence of hope rendered gentle and mysterious in its manifestations. Socially too far removed from Mademoiselle Claës by his want of fortune, with nothing but a noble name to offer her, he saw no chance of ever being her husband. Yet he had always hoped for certain encouragements which Marguerite refused to give before the failing eyes of her dying mother. Both equally pure, they had never said to one another a word of love. Their joys were solitary joys tasted by each alone. They trembled apart, though together they quivered beneath the rays of the same hope. They seemed to fear themselves, conscious that each only too surely belonged to the other. Emmanuel trembled lest he should touch the hand of the sovereign to whom he had made a shrine in his heart; a chance contact would have roused hopes that were too ardent, he could not then have mastered the force of his passion. And yet, while neither bestowed the vast, though trivial, the innocent and yet all-meaning signs of love that even timid lovers allow themselves, they were so firmly fixed in each other's hearts that both were ready to make the greatest sacrifices, which were, indeed, the only pleasures their love could expect to taste.

Since Madame Claës's death this hidden love was shrouded in mourning. The tints of the sphere in which it lived, dark and dim from the first, were now black;

the few lights were veiled by tears. Marguerite's reserve changed to coldness; she remembered the promise exacted by her mother. With more freedom of action, she nevertheless became more distant. Emmanuel shared his beloved's grief, comprehending that the slightest word or wish of love at such a time transgressed the laws of the heart. Their love was therefore more concealed than it had ever been. These tender souls sounded the same note: held apart by grief, as formerly by the timidities of youth and by respect for the sufferings of the mother, they clung to the magnificent language of the eyes, the mute eloquence of devoted actions, the constant unison of thoughts, — divine harmonies of youth, the first steps of a love still in its infancy. Emmanuel came every morning to inquire for Claës and Marguerite, but he never entered the dining-room, where the family now sat, unless to bring a letter from Gabriel or when Balthazar invited him to come in. His first glance at the young girl contained a thousand sympathetic thoughts; it told her that he suffered under these conventional restraints, that he never left her, he was always with her, he shared her grief. He shed the tears of his own pain into the soul of his dear one by a look that was marred by no selfish reservation. His good heart lived so completely in the present, he clung so firmly to a happiness which he believed to be fugitive, that Marguerite sometimes reproached herself for not generously holding out her hand and saying, "Let us at least be friends."

Pierquin continued his suit with an obstinacy which is the unreflecting patience of fools. He judged Marguerite by the ordinary rules of the multitude when judging of women. He believed that the words marriage, freedom, fortune, which he had put into her mind, would germinate and flower into wishes by which he could profit; he imagined that her coldness was mere dissimulation. But surround her as he would with gallant attentions, he could not hide the despotic ways of a man accustomed to manage the private affairs of many families with a high hand. He discoursed to her in those platitudes of consolation common to his profession, which crawl like snails over the suffering mind, leaving behind them a trail of barren words which profane its sanctity. His tenderness was mere wheedling. He dropped his feigned melancholy at the door when he put on his overshoes, or took his umbrella. He used the tone his long intimacy authorized as an instrument to work himself still further into the bosom of the family, and bring Marguerite to a marriage which the whole town was beginning to foresee. The true, devoted, respectful, love formed a striking contrast to its selfish, calculating semblance. Each man's conduct was homogeneous: one feigned a passion and seized every advantage to obtain the prize; the other hid his love and trembled lest he should betray his devotion.

Some time after the death of her mother, and, as it happened, on the same day, Marguerite was enabled to compare the only two men of whom she had any opportunity of judging; for the social solitude to which she was condemned kept her from seeing life and gave no access to those who might think of her in marriage. One day after breakfast, on a fine morning in April, Emmanuel called at the house just as Monsieur Claës was going out. The aspect of his own house was so unendurable to Balthazar that he spent part of every day in walking about the ramparts. Emmanuel made a motion as if to follow him, then he hesitated, seemed to gather up his courage, looked at Marguerite and remained. The young girl felt sure that he wished to speak with her, and asked him to go into the garden; then she sent Félicie to Martha, who was sewing in the antechamber on the upper floor, and seated herself on a garden-seat in full view of her sister and the old duenna.

"Monsieur Claës is as much absorbed by grief as he once was by science," began the young man, watching Balthazar as he slowly crossed the court-yard. "Every one in Douai pities him; he moves like a man who has lost all consciousness of life; he stops without a purpose, he gazes without seeing anything."

"Every sorrow has its own expression," said Marguerite, checking her tears. "What is it you wish to say to me?" she added after a pause, coldly and with dignity.

"Mademoiselle," answered Emmanuel in a voice of feeling, "I scarcely know if I have the right to speak to you as I am about to do? Think only of my desire to be of service to you, and give me the right of a teacher to be interested in the future of a pupil. Your brother Gabriel is over fifteen; he is in the second class; it is now necessary to direct his studies in the line of whatever future career he may take up. It is for your father to decide what that career shall be: if he gives the matter no thought, the injury to Gabriel will be serious. But then, again, would it not mortify your father if you showed him that he is neglecting his son's interests? Under these circumstances, could you not yourself consult Gabriel as to his tastes, and help him to choose a career, so that later, if his father should think of making him a public officer, an administrator, a soldier, he might be prepared with some special training? I do not suppose that either you or Monsieur Claës would wish to bring Gabriel up in idleness."

"Oh, no!" said Marguerite; "when my mother taught us to make lace, and took such pains with our drawing and music and embroidery, she often said we must be prepared for whatever might happen to us. Gabriel ought to have a thorough education and a personal value. But tell me, what career is the best for a man to choose?"

"Mademoiselle," said Emmanuel, trembling with pleasure, "Gabriel is at the head of his class in mathematics; if he would like to enter the École Polytechnique, he could there acquire the practical knowledge which will fit him for any career. When he leaves the École he can choose the path in life for which he feels the strongest bias. Thus, without compromising his future, you will have saved a great deal of time. Men who leave the École with honors are sought after on all sides; the school turns out statesmen, diplomats, men of science, engineers, generals, sailors, magistrates, manufacturers, and bankers. There is nothing extraordinary in the son of a rich or noble family preparing himself to enter it. If Gabriel decides on this course I shall ask you to — will you grant my request? Say yes!"

"What is it?"

"Let me be his tutor," he answered, trembling.

Marguerite looked at Monsieur de Solis; then she took his hand, and said, "Yes" — and paused, adding presently in a broken voice: —

"How much I value the delicacy which makes you offer me a thing I can accept from you. In all that you have said I see how much you have thought for us. I thank you."

Though the words were simply said, Emmanuel turned away his head not to show the tears that the delight of being useful to her brought to his eyes.

"I will bring both boys to see you," he said, when he was a little calmer; "to-morrow is a holiday."

He rose and bowed to Marguerite, who followed him into the house; when he had crossed the court-yard he turned and saw her still at the door of the dining-room, from which she made him a friendly sign.

After dinner Pierquin came to see Monsieur Claës, and sat down between father and daughter on the very bench in the garden where Emmanuel had sat that morning.

"My dear cousin," he said to Balthazar, "I have come to-night to talk to you on business. It is now forty-two days since the decease of your wife."

"I keep no account of time," said Balthazar, wiping away the tears that came at the word "decease."

"Oh, monsieur!" cried Marguerite, looking at the lawyer, "how can you?"

"But, my dear Marguerite, we notaries are obliged to consider the limits of time appointed by law. This is a matter which concerns you and your co-heirs. Monsieur Claës has none but minor children, and he must make an inventory of his property within forty-five days of his wife's decease, so as to render in his accounts at the end of that time. It is necessary to know the value of his property before deciding whether to accept it as sufficient security, or whether we must fall back on the legal rights of minors."

Marguerite rose.

"Do not go away, my dear cousin," continued Pierquin; "my words concern you — you and your father both. You know how truly I share your grief, but to-day you must give your attention to legal details. If you do not, every one of you will get into serious difficulties. I am only doing my duty as the family lawyer."

"He is right," said Claës.

"The time expires in two days," resumed Pierquin; "and I must begin the inventory to-morrow, if only to postpone the payment of the legacy-tax which the public treasurer will come here and demand. Treasurers have no hearts; they don't trouble themselves about feelings; they fasten their claws upon us at all seasons. Therefore for the next two days my clerk and I will be here from ten till four with Monsieur Raparlier, the public appraiser. After we get through the town property we shall go into the country. As for the forest of Waignies, we shall be obliged to hold a consultation about that. Now let us turn to another matter. We must call a family council and appoint a guardian to protect the interests of the minor children. Monsieur Conyncks of Bruges is your nearest relative; but he has now become a Belgian. You ought," continued Pierquin, addressing Balthazar, "to write to him on this matter; you can then find out if he has any intention of settling in France, where he has a fine property. Perhaps you could persuade him and his daughter to move into French Flanders. If he refuses, then I must see about making up the council with the other near relatives."

"What is the use of an inventory?" asked Marguerite.

"To put on record the value and the claims of the property, its debts and its assets. When that is all clearly scheduled, the family council, acting on behalf of the minors, makes such dispositions as it sees fit."

"Pierquin," said Claës, rising from the bench, "do all that is necessary to protect the rights of my children; but spare us the distress of selling the things that belonged to my dear—" he was unable to continue; but he spoke with so noble an air and in a tone of such deep feeling that Marguerite took her father's hand and kissed it.

"To-morrow, then," said Pierquin.

"Come to breakfast," said Claës; then he seemed to gather his scattered senses together and exclaimed:

"But in my marriage contract, which was drawn under the laws of Hainault, I released my wife from the obligation of making an inventory, in order that she might not be annoyed by it: it is very probable that I was equally released —"

"Oh, what happiness!" cried Marguerite. "It would have been so distressing to us."

"Well, I will look into your marriage contract to-morrow," said the notary, rather confused.

"Then you did not know of this?" said Marguerite.

This remark closed the interview; the lawyer was far too much confused to continue it after the young girl's comment.

"The devil is in it!" he said to himself as he crossed the court-yard. "That man's wandering memory comes back to him in the nick of time, — just when he needed it to hinder us from taking precautions against him! I have cracked my brains to save the property of those children. I meant to proceed regularly and come to an understanding with old Conyncks, and here's the end of it! I shall lose ground with Marguerite, for she will certainly ask her father why I wanted an inventory of the property, which she now sees was not necessary; and Claës will tell her that notaries have a passion for writing documents, that we are lawyers above all, above cousins or friends or relatives, and all such stuff as that."

He slammed the street door violently, railing at clients who ruin themselves by sensitiveness.

Balthazar was right. No inventory could be made. Nothing, therefore, was done to settle the relation of the father to the children in the matter of property.

XI.

Several months went by and brought no change to the House of Claës. Gabriel, under the wise management of his tutor, Monsieur de Solis, worked studiously, acquired foreign languages, and prepared to pass the necessary examinations to enter the École Polytechnique. Marguerite and Félicie lived in absolute retirement, going in summer to their father's country place as a measure of economy. Monsieur Claës attended to his business affairs, paid his debts by borrowing a considerable sum of money on his property, and went to see the forest at Waignies.

About the middle of the year 1817, his grief, slowly abating, left him a prey to solitude and defenceless under the monotony of the life he was leading, which heavily oppressed him. At first he struggled bravely against the allurements of Science as they gradually beset him; he forbade himself even to think of Chemistry. Then he did think of it. Still, he would not actively take it up, and only gave his mind to his researches theoretically. Such constant study, however, swelled his passion which soon became exacting. He asked himself whether he was really bound not to continue his researches, and remembered that his wife had refused his oath. Though he had pledged his word to himself that he would never pursue the solution of the great Problem, might he not change that determination at a moment when he foresaw success? He was now fifty-nine years old. At that age a predominant idea contracts a certain peevish fixedness which is the first stage of monomania.

Circumstances conspired against his tottering loyalty. The peace which Europe now enjoyed encouraged the circulation of discoveries and scientific ideas acquired during the war by the learned of various countries, who for nearly twenty years had been unable to hold communication. Science was making great strides. Claës found that the progress of chemistry had been directed, unknown to chemists themselves, towards the object of his researches. Learned men devoted to the higher sciences thought, as he did, that light, heat, electricity, galvanism, magnetism were all different effects of the same cause, and that the difference existing between substances hitherto considered simple must be produced by varying proportions of an unknown principle. The fear that some other chemist might effect the reduction of metals and discover the constituent principle of electricity, — two achievements which would lead to the solution of the chemical Absolute, —

increased what the people of Douai called a mania, and drove his desires to a paroxysm conceivable to those who devote themselves to the sciences, or who have ever known the tyranny of ideas.

Thus it happened that Balthazar was again carried away by a passion all the more violent because it had lain dormant so long. Marguerite, who watched every evidence of her father's state of mind, opened the long-closed parlor. By living in it she recalled the painful memories which her mother's death had caused, and succeeded for a time in re-awaking her father's grief, and retarding his plunge into the gulf to the depths of which he was, nevertheless, doomed to fall. She determined to go into society and force Balthazar to share in its distractions. Several good marriages were proposed to her, which occupied Claës's mind, but to all of them she replied that she should not marry until after she was twenty-five. But in spite of his daughter's efforts, in spite of his remorseful struggles, Balthazar, at the beginning of the winter, returned secretly to his researches. It was difficult, however, to hide his operations from the inquisitive women in the kitchen; and one morning Martha, while dressing Marguerite, said to her: —

"Mademoiselle, we are as good as lost. That monster of a Mulquinier — who is a devil disguised, for I never saw him make the sign of the cross — has gone back to the garret. There's monsieur on the high-road to hell. Pray God he may n't kill you as he killed my poor mistress."

"It is not possible!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Come and see the signs of their traffic."

Mademoiselle Claës ran to the window and saw the light smoke rising from the flue of the laboratory.

"I shall be twenty-one in a few months," she thought, "and I shall know how to oppose the destruction of our property."

In giving way to his passion Balthazar necessarily felt less respect for the interests of his children than he formerly had felt for the happiness of his wife. The barriers were less high, his conscience was more elastic, his passion had increased in strength. He now set forth in his career of glory, toil, hope, and poverty, with the fervor of a man profoundly trustful of his convictions. Certain of the result, he worked night and day with a fury that alarmed his daughters, who did not know how little a man is injured by work that gives him pleasure.

Her father had no sooner recommenced his experiments than Marguerite retrenched the superfluities of the table, showing a parsimony worthy of a miser, in which Josette and Martha admirably seconded her. Claës never noticed the change which reduced the household living to the merest necessaries. First he ceased to breakfast with the family; then he only left his laboratory when dinner was ready; and at last, before he went to bed, he would sit some hours in the parlor between his daughters without saying a word to either of them; when he rose to go upstairs they wished him good-night, and he allowed them mechanically to kiss him on both cheeks. Such conduct would have led to great domestic misfortunes had Marguerite not been prepared to exercise the authority of a mother, and if, moreover, she were not protected by a secret love from the dangers of so much liberty.

Pierquin had ceased to come to the house, judging that the family ruin would soon be complete. Balthazar's rural estates, which yielded sixteen thousand francs a year, and were worth about six hundred thousand, were now encumbered by mortgages to the amount of three hundred thousand francs; for, in order to recommence his researches, Claës had borrowed a considerable sum of money. The rents were exactly enough to pay the interest of the mortgages; but, with the improvidence of a man who is the slave of an idea, he made over the income from his farm lands to Marguerite for the expenses of the household, and the notary calculated that three years would suffice to bring matters to a crisis, when the law would step in and eat up all that Balthazar had not squandered. Marguerite's coldness brought Pierquin to a state of almost hostile indifference. To give himself an appearance in the eyes of the world of having renounced her hand, he frequently remarked of the Claës family in a tone of compassion: —

"Those poor people are ruined; I have done my best to save them. Well, it can't be helped; Mademoiselle Claës refused to employ the legal means which might have rescued them from poverty."

Emmanuel de Solis, who was now principal of the college-school in Douai, thanks to the influence of his uncle and to his own merits which made him worthy of the post, came every evening to see the two young girls, who called the old duenna into the parlor as soon as their father had gone to bed. Emmanuel's gentle rap at the street-door was never missing. For the last three months, encouraged by the gracious, though mute gratitude with which Marguerite now accepted his attentions, he became at his ease, and was seen for what he was. The brightness of his pure spirit shone like a flawless diamond; Marguerite learned to understand its strength and its constancy when she saw how inexhaustible was the source from which it came. She loved to watch the unfolding, one by one, of the blossoms of his heart, whose perfume she had already breathed. Each day Emmanuel realized some one of Marguerite's hopes, and illumined the enchanted regions of love with new lights that chased away the clouds and brought to view the serene heavens, giving color to the fruitful riches hidden away in the shadow of their lives. More at his ease, the young man could display the seductive qualities of his heart until now discreetly hidden, the expansive gayety of his age, the simplicity which comes of a life of study, the treasures of a delicate mind that life has not adulterated, the innocent joyousness which goes so well with loving youth. His soul and Marguerite's understood each other better; they went together to the depths of their hearts and found in each the same thoughts, — pearls of equal lustre, sweet fresh harmonies like those the legends tell of beneath the waves, which fascinate the divers. They made themselves known to one another by an interchange of thought, a reciprocal introspection which bore the signs, in both, of exquisite sensibility. It was done without false shame, but not without mutual coquetry. The two hours which Emmanuel spent with the sisters and old Martha enabled Marguerite to accept the life of anguish and renunciation on which she had entered. This artless, progressive love was her support. In all his testimonies of affection Emmanuel showed the natural grace that is so winning, the sweet yet subtile mind which breaks the uniformity of sentiment as the facets of a diamond relieve, by their many-sided fires, the monotony of the stone, — adorable wisdom, the secret of loving hearts, which makes a woman pliant to the artistic hand that gives new life to old, old forms, and refreshes with novel modulations the phrases of love. Love is not only a sentiment, it is an art. Some simple word, a trifling vigilance, a nothing, reveals to a woman the great, the divine artist who shall touch her heart and yet not blight it. The more Emmanuel was free to utter himself, the more charming were the expressions of his love.

"I have tried to get here before Pierquin," he said to Marguerite one evening. "He is bringing some bad news; I would rather you heard it from me. Your father has sold all the timber in your forest at Waignies to speculators, who have resold it to dealers. The trees are already felled, and the logs are carried away. Monsieur Claës received three hundred thousand francs in cash as a first instalment of the price, which he has used towards paying his bills in Paris; but to clear off his debts entirely he has been forced to assign a hundred thousand francs of the three hundred thousand still due to him on the purchase-money."

Pierquin entered at this moment.

"Ah! my dear cousin," he said, "you are ruined. I told you how it would be; but you would not listen to me. Your father has an insatiable appetite. He has swallowed your woods at a mouthful. Your family guardian, Monsieur Conyncks, is just now absent in Amsterdam, and Claës has seized the opportunity to strike the blow. It is all wrong. I have written to

Monsieur Conyncks, but he will get here too late; everything will be squandered. You will be obliged to sue your father. The suit can't be long, but it will be dishonorable. Monsieur Conyncks has no alternative but to institute proceedings; the law requires it. This is the result of your obstinacy. Do you now see my prudence, and how devoted I was to your interests?"

"I bring you some good news, mademoiselle," said young de Solis in his gentle voice. "Gabriel has been admitted to the École Polytechnique. The difficulties that seemed in the way have all been removed."

Marguerite thanked him with a smile as she said: —

"My savings will now come in play! Martha, we must begin to-morrow on Gabriel's outfit. My poor Félicie, we shall have to work hard," she added, kissing her sister's forehead.

"To-morrow you shall have him at home, to remain ten days," said Emmanuel; "he must be in Paris by the fifteenth of November."

"My cousin Gabriel has done a sensible thing," said the lawyer, eyeing the professor from head to foot; "for he will have to make his own way. But, my dear cousin, the question now is how to save the honor of the family: will you listen to what I say this time?"

"No," she said, "not if it relates to marriage."

"Then what will you do?"

"I? — nothing."

"But you are of age."

"I shall be in a few days. Have you any course to suggest to me," she added, "which will reconcile our interests with the duty we owe to our father and to the honor of the family?"

"My dear cousin, nothing can be done till your uncle arrives. When he does, I will call again."

"Adieu, monsieur," said Marguerite.

"The poorer she is the more airs she gives herself," thought the notary. "Adieu, mademoiselle," he said aloud. "Monsieur, my respects to you;" and he went away, paying no attention to Félicie or Martha.

"I have been studying the Code for the last two days, and I have consulted an experienced old lawyer, a friend of my uncle," said Emmanuel, in a hesitating voice. "If you will allow me, I will go to Amsterdam to-morrow and see Monsieur Conyncks. Listen, dear Marguerite —"

He uttered her name for the first time; she thanked him with a smile and a tearful glance, and made a gentle inclination of her head. He paused, looking at Félicie and Martha.

"Speak before my sister," said Marguerite. "She is so docile and courageous that she does not need this discussion to make her resigned to our life of toil and privation; but it is best that she should see for herself how necessary courage is to us."

The two sisters clasped hands and kissed each other, as if to renew some pledge of union before the coming disaster.

"Leave us, Martha."

"Dear Marguerite," said Emmanuel, letting the happiness he felt in conquering the lesser rights of affection sound in the inflections of his voice, "I have procured the names and addresses of the purchasers who still owe the remaining two hundred thousand francs on the felled timber. To-morrow, if you give consent, a lawyer acting in the name of Monsieur Conyncks, who will not disavow the act, will serve an injunction upon them. Six days hence, by which time your uncle will have returned, the family council can be called together, and Gabriel put in possession of his legal rights, for he is now eighteen. You and your brother being thus authorized to use those rights, you will demand your share in the proceeds of the timber. Monsieur Claës cannot refuse you the two hundred thousand francs on which the injunction will have been put; as to the remaining hundred thousand which is due to you, you must obtain a mortgage on this house. Monsieur Conyncks will demand securities for the three hundred thousand belonging to Félicie and Jean. Under these circumstances your father will be obliged to mortgage his property on the plain of Orchies, which he has already encumbered to the amount of three hundred thousand francs. The law gives a retrospective priority to the claims of minors; and that will save you. Monsieur Claës's hands will be tied for the future; your property becomes inalienable, and he can no longer borrow on his own estates because they will be held as security for other sums. Moreover, the whole can be done quietly, without scandal or legal proceedings. Your father will be forced to greater prudence in making his researches, even if he cannot be persuaded to relinquish them altogether."

"Yes," said Marguerite, "but where, meantime, can we find the means of living? The hundred thousand francs for which, you say, I must obtain a mortgage on this house, would bring in nothing while we still live here. The proceeds of my father's property in the country will pay the interest on the three hundred thousand francs he owes to others; but how are we to live?"

"In the first place," said Emmanuel, "by investing the fifty thousand francs which belong to Gabriel in the public Funds you will get, according to present rates, more than four thousand francs' income, which will suffice to pay your brother's board and lodging and all his other expenses in Paris. Gabriel cannot touch the capital until he is of age, therefore you need not fear that he will waste a penny of it, and you will have one expense the less. Besides, you will have your own fifty thousand."

"My father will ask me for them," she said in a frightened tone; "and I shall not be able to refuse him."

"Well, dear Marguerite, even so, you can evade that by robbing yourself. Place your money in the Grand-Livre in Gabriel's name: it will bring you twelve or thirteen thousand francs a year. Minors who are emancipated cannot sell property without permission of the family council; you will thus gain three years' peace of mind. By that time your father will either have solved his problem or renounced it; and Gabriel, then of age, will reinvest the money in your own name."

Marguerite made him explain to her once more the legal points which she did not at first understand. It was certainly a novel sight to see this pair of lovers poring over the Code, which Emmanuel had brought with him to show his mistress the laws which protected the property of minors; she quickly caught the meaning of them, thanks to the natural penetration of women, which in this case love still further sharpened.

Gabriel came home to his father's house on the following day. When Monsieur de Solis brought him up to Balthazar and told of his admission to the École Polytechnique, the father thanked the professor with a wave of his hand, and said: —

"I am very glad; Gabriel may become a man of science."

"Oh, my brother," cried Marguerite, as Balthazar went back to his laboratory, "work hard, waste no money; spend what is necessary, but practise economy. On the days when you are allowed to go out, pass your time with our friends and relations; contract none of the habits which ruin young men in Paris. Your expenses will amount to nearly three thousand francs, and that will leave you a thousand francs for your pocket-money; that is surely enough."

"I will answer for him," said Emmanuel de Solis, laying his hand on his pupil's shoulder.

A month later, Monsieur Conyncks, in conjunction with Marguerite, had obtained all necessary securities from Claës. The plan so wisely proposed by Emmanuel de Solis was fully approved and executed. Face to face with the law, and in presence of his cousin, whose stern sense of honor allowed no compromise, Balthazar, ashamed of the sale of the timber to which he had consented at a moment when he was harassed by creditors, submitted to all that was demanded of him. Glad to repair the almost involuntary wrong that he had done to his children, he signed the deeds in a preoccupied way. He was now as careless and improvident as a negro who sells his wife in the morning for a drop of brandy, and cries for her at night. He gave no thought to even the immediate future, and never asked himself what resources he would have when his last ducat was melted up. He pursued his work and continued his purchases, apparently unaware that he was now no more than the titular owner of his house and lands, and that he could not, thanks to the severity of the laws, raise another penny upon a property of which he was now, as it were, the legal guardian.

The year 1818 ended without bringing any new misfortune. The sisters paid the costs of Jean's education and met all the expenses of the household out of the thirteen thousand francs a year from the sum placed in the Grand-Livre in Gabriel's name, which he punctually remitted to them. Monsieur de Solis lost his uncle, the abbé, in December of that year.

Early in January Marguerite learned through Martha that her father had sold his collection of tulips, also the furniture of the front house, and all the family silver. She was obliged to buy back the spoons and forks that were necessary for the daily service of the table, and these she now ordered to be stamped with her initials. Until that day Marguerite had kept silence towards her father on the subject of his depredations, but that evening after dinner she requested Félicie to leave her alone with him, and when he seated himself as usual by the corner of the parlor fireplace, she said: —

"My dear father, you are the master here, and can sell everything, even your children. We are ready to obey you without a murmur; but I am forced to tell you that we are without money, that we have barely enough to live on, and that Félicie and I are obliged to work night and day to pay for the schooling of little Jean with the price of the lace dress we are now making. My dear father, I implore you to give up your researches."

"You are right, my dear child; in six weeks they will be finished; I shall have found the Absolute, or the Absolute will be proved undiscoverable. You will have millions — "

"Give us meanwhile the bread to eat," replied Marguerite.

"Bread? is there no bread here?" said Claës, with a frightened air. "No bread in the house of a Claës! What has become of our property?"

"You have cut down the forest of Waignies. The ground has not been cleared and is therefore unproductive. As for your farms at Orchies, the rents scarcely suffice to pay the interest of the sums you have borrowed — "

"Then what are we living on?" he demanded.

Marguerite held up her needle and continued: —

"Gabriel's income helps us, but it is insufficient; I can make both ends meet at the close of the year if you do not overwhelm me with bills that I do not expect, for purchases you tell me nothing about. When I think I have enough to meet my quarterly expenses some unexpected bill for potash, or zinc, or sulphur, is brought to me."

"My dear child, have patience for six weeks; after that, I will be judicious. My little Marguerite, you shall see wonders."

"It is time you should think of your affairs. You have sold everything, — pictures, tulips, plate; nothing is left. At least, refrain from making debts."

"I don't wish to make any more!" he said.

"Any more?" she cried, "then you have some?"

"Mere trifles," he said, but he dropped his eyes and colored.

For the first time in her life Marguerite felt humiliated by the lowering of her father's character, and suffered from it so much that she dared not question him.

A month after this scene one of the Douai bankers brought a bill of exchange for ten thousand francs signed by Claës. Marguerite asked the banker to wait a day, and expressed her regret that she had not been notified to prepare for this payment; whereupon he informed her that the house of Protez and Chiffreville held nine other bills to the same amount, falling due in consecutive months.

"All is over!" cried Marguerite, "the time has come."

She sent for her father, and walked up and down the parlor with hasty steps, talking to herself: —

"A hundred thousand francs!" she cried. "I must find them, or see my father in prison. What am I to do?"

Balthazar did not come. Weary of waiting for him, Marguerite went up to the laboratory. As she entered she saw him in the middle of an immense, brilliantly-lighted room, filled with machinery and dusty glass vessels: here and there were books, and tables encumbered with specimens and products ticketed and numbered. On all sides the disorder of scientific pursuits contrasted strongly with Flemish habits. This litter of retorts and vaporizers, metals, fantastically colored crystals, specimens hooked upon the walls or lying on the furnaces, surrounded the central figure of Balthazar Claës, without a coat, his arms bare like those of a workman, his breast exposed, and showing the white hairs which covered it. His eyes were gazing with horrible fixity at a pneumatic trough. The receiver of this instrument was covered with a lens made of double convex glasses, the space between the glasses being filled with alchohol, which focussed the light coming through one of the compartments of the rose-window of the garret. The shelf of the receiver communicated with the wire of an immense galvanic battery. Lemulquinier, busy at the moment in moving the pedestal of the machine, which was placed on a movable axle so as to keep the lens in a perpendicular direction to the rays of the sun, turned round, his face black with dust, and called out, —

"Ha! mademoiselle, don't come in."

The aspect of her father, half-kneeling beside the instrument, and receiving the full strength of the sunlight upon his head, the protuberances of his skull, its scanty hairs resembling threads of silver, his face contracted by the agonies of expectation, the strangeness of the objects that surrounded him, the obscurity of parts of the vast garret from which fantastic engines seemed about to spring, all contributed to startle Marguerite, who said to herself, in terror, —

"He is mad!"

Then she went up to him and whispered in his ear, "Send away Lemulquinier."

"No, no, my child; I want him: I am in the midst of an experiment no one has yet thought of. For the last three days we have been watching for every ray of sun. I now have the means of submitting metals, in a complete vacuum, to concentrated solar fires and to electric currents. At this very moment the most powerful action a chemist can employ is about to show results which I alone —"

"My father, instead of vaporizing metals you should employ them in paying your notes of hand —"

"Wait, wait!"

"Monsieur Mersktus has been here, father; and he must have ten thousand francs by four o'clock."

"Yes, yes, presently. True, I did sign a little note which is payable this month. I felt sure I should have found the Absolute. Good God! If I could only have a July sun the experiment would be successful."

He grasped his head and sat down on an old cane chair; a few tears rolled from his eyes.

"Monsieur is quite right," said Lemulquinier; "it is all the fault of that rascally sun which is too feeble, — the coward, the lazy thing!"

Master and valet paid no further attention to Marguerite.

"Leave us, Mulquinier," she said.

"Ah! I see a new experiment!" cried Claës.

"Father, lay aside your experiments," said his daughter, when they were alone. "You have one hundred thousand francs to pay, and we have not a penny. Leave your laboratory; your honor is in question. What will become of you if you are put in prison? Will you soil your white hairs and the name of Claës with the disgrace of bankruptcy? I will not allow it. I shall have strength to oppose your madness; it would be dreadful to see you without bread in your old age. Open your eyes to our position; see reason at last!"

"Madness!" cried Balthazar, struggling to his feet. He fixed his luminous eyes upon his daughter, crossed his arms on his breast, and repeated the word "Madness!" so majestically that Marguerite trembled.

"Ah!" he cried, "your mother would never have uttered that word to me. She was not ignorant of the importance of my researches; she learned a science to understand me; she recognized that I toiled for the human race; she knew there was nothing sordid or selfish in my aims. The feelings of a loving wife are higher, I see it now, than filial affection. Yes, Love is above all other feelings. See reason!" he went on, striking his breast. "Do I lack reason? Am I not myself? You say we are poor; well, my daughter, I choose it to be so. I am your father, obey me. I will make you rich when I please. Your fortune? it is a pittance! When I find the solvent of carbon I will fill your parlor with diamonds, and they are but a scintilla of what I seek. You can well afford to wait while I consume my life in superhuman efforts."

"Father, I have no right to ask an account of the four millions you have already engulfed in this fatal garret. I will not speak to you of my mother whom you killed. If I had a husband, I should love him, doubtless, as she loved you; I should be ready to sacrifice all to him, as she sacrificed all for you. I have obeyed her orders in giving myself wholly to you; I have proved it in not marrying and compelling you to render an account of your guardianship. Let us dismiss the past and think of the present. I am here now to represent the necessity which you have created for yourself. You must have money to meet your notes — do you understand me? There is nothing left to seize here but the portrait of your ancestor, the Claës martyr. I come in the name of my mother, who felt herself too feeble to defend her children against their father; she ordered me to resist you. I come in the name of my brothers and my sister: I come, father, in the name of all the Claës, and I command you to give up your experiments, or earn the means of pursuing them hereafter, if pursue them you must. If you arm yourself with the power of your paternity, which you employ only for our destruction, I have on my side your ancestors and your honor, whose voice is louder than that of chemistry. The Family is greater than Science. I have been too long your daughter."

"And you choose to be my executioner," he said, in a feeble voice.

Marguerite turned and fled away, that she might not abdicate the part she had just assumed: she fancied she heard again her mother's voice saying to her, "Do not oppose your father too much; love him well."

XII.

"Mademoiselle has made a pretty piece of work up yonder," said Lemulquinier, coming down to the kitchen for his breakfast. "We were just going to put our hands on the great secret, we only wanted a scrap of July sun, for monsieur, — ah, what a man! he 's almost in the shoes of the good God himself! — was almost within *that*," he said to Josette, clicking his thumbnail against a front tooth, "of getting hold of the Absolute, when up she came, slam bang, screaming some nonsense about notes of hand."

"Well, pay them yourself," said Martha, "out of your wages."

"Where 's the butter for my bread?" said Lemulquinier to the cook.

"Where 's the money to buy it?" she answered, sharply. "Come, old villain, if you make gold in that devil's kitchen of yours, why don't you make butter? 'T would n't be half so difficult, and you could sell it in the market for enough to make the pot boil. We all eat dry bread. The young ladies are satisfied with dry bread and nuts, and do you expect to be better fed than your masters? Mademoiselle won't spend more than one hundred francs a month for the whole household. There 's only one dinner for all. If you want dainties you 've got your furnaces upstairs where you fricassee pearls till there 's nothing else talked of in town. Get your roast chickens up there."

Lemulquinier took his dry bread and went out.

" He will go and buy something to eat with his own money," said Martha; " all the better, — it is just so much saved. Is n't he stingy, the old scarecrow ! "

"Starve him ! that 's the only way to manage him," said Josette. " For a week past he has n't rubbed a single floor ; I have to do his work, for he is always upstairs. He can very well afford to pay me for it with the present of a few herrings ; if he brings any home, I shall lay hands on them, I can tell him that."

"Ah ! " exclaimed Martha, " I hear Mademoiselle Marguerite crying. Her wizard of a father would swallow the house at a gulp without asking a Christian blessing, the old sorcerer ! In my country he 'd be burned alive ; but people here have no more religion than the Moors in Africa."

Marguerite could scarcely stifle her sobs as she came through the gallery. She reached her room, took out her mother's letter, and read as follows : —

My Child, — If God so wills, my spirit will be within your heart when you read these words, the last I shall ever write; they are full of love for my dear ones, left at the mercy of a demon whom I have not been able to resist. When you read these words he will have taken your last crust, just as he took my life and squandered my love. You know, my darling, if I loved your father: I die loving him less, for I take precautions against him which I never could have practised while living. Yes, in the depths of my coffin I shall have kept a last resource for the day when some terrible misfortune overtakes you. If when that day comes you are reduced to poverty, or if your honor is in question, my child, send for Monsieur de Solis, should he be living,— if not, for his nephew, our good Emmanuel; they hold one hundred and seventy thousand francs which are yours and will enable you to live.

If nothing shall have subdued his passion; if his children prove no stronger barrier than my happiness has been, and cannot stop his criminal career, — leave him, leave your father, that you may live. I could not forsake him; I was bound to him. You, Marguerite, you must save the family. I absolve you for all you may do to defend Gabriel and Jean and Félicie. Take courage; be the guardian angel of the Claës. Be firm, — I dare not say be pitiless; but to repair the evil already done you must keep some means at hand. On the day when you read this letter, regard yourself as ruined already, for nothing will stay the fury of that passion which has torn all things from me.

My child, remember this: the truest love is to forget your heart. Even though you be forced to deceive your father, your dissimulation will be blessed; your actions, however blamable they may seem, will be heroic if taken to protect the family. The virtuous Monsieur de Solis tells me so; and no conscience was ever purer or more enlightened than his. I could never have had the courage to speak these words to you, even with my dying breath.

And yet, my daughter, be respectful, be kind in the dreadful struggle. Resist him, but love him; deny him gently. My hidden tears, my inward griefs will be known only when I am dead. Kiss my dear children in my name when the hour comes and you are called upon to protect them.

May God and the saints be with you!

JOSÉPHINE.

To this letter was added an acknowledgment from the Messieurs de Solis, uncle and nephew, who thereby bound themselves to place the money intrusted to them by Madame Claës in the hands of whoever of her children should present the paper.

"Martha," cried Marguerite to the duenna, who came quickly; "go to Monsieur Emmanuel de Solis, and ask him to come to me.—Noble, discreet heart! he never told me," she thought; "though all my griefs and cares are his, he never told me!"

Emmanuel came before Martha could get back.

"You have kept a secret from me," she said, showing him her mother's letter.

Emmanuel bent his head.

"Marguerite, are you in great trouble?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered; "be my support,—you, whom my mother calls 'our good Emmanuel.'" She showed him the letter, unable to repress her joy in knowing that her mother approved her choice.

"My blood and my life were yours on the morrow of the day when I first saw you in the gallery," he said;

"but I scarcely dared to hope the time might come when you would accept them. If you know me well, you know my word is sacred. Forgive the absolute obedience I have paid to your mother's wishes; it was not for me to judge her intentions."

"You have saved us," she said, interrupting him, and taking his arm to go down to the parlor.

After hearing from Emmanuel the origin of the money intrusted to him, Marguerite confided to him the terrible straits in which the family now found themselves.

"I must pay those notes at once," said Emmanuel. "If Mersktus holds them all, you can at least save the interest. I will bring you the remaining seventy thousand francs. My poor uncle left me quite a large sum in ducats, which are easy to carry secretly."

"Oh!" she said, "bring them at night; we can hide them when my father is asleep. If he knew that I had money, he might try to force it from me. Oh, Emmanuel, think what it is to distrust a father!" she said, weeping and resting her forehead against the young man's heart.

This sad, confiding movement, with which the young girl asked protection, was the first expression of a love hitherto wrapped in melancholy and restrained within a sphere of grief: the heart, too full, was forced to overflow beneath the pressure of this new misery.

"What can we do; what will become of us? He sees nothing, he cares for nothing, — neither for us nor for himself. I know not how he can live in that garret, where the air is stifling."

"What can you expect of a man who calls incessantly, like Richard III., 'My kingdom for a horse'?" said Emmanuel. "He is pitiless; and in that you must imitate him. Pay his notes; give him, if you will, your whole fortune; but that of your sister and of your brothers is neither yours nor his."

"Give him my fortune?" she said, pressing her lover's hand and looking at him with ardor in her eyes; "you advise it, you! — and Pierquin told a hundred lies to make me keep it!"

"Alas! I may be selfish in my own way," he said. "Sometimes I long for you without fortune; you seem nearer to me then! At other times I want you rich and happy, and I feel how paltry it is to think that the poor grandeurs of wealth can separate us."

"Dear, let us not speak of ourselves."

"Ourselves!" he repeated, with rapture. Then, after a pause, he added: "The evil is great, but it is not irreparable."

"It can be repaired only by us: the Claës family has now no head. To reach the stage of being neither father nor man, to have no consciousness of justice or injustice (for, in defiance of the laws, he has dissipated —

he, so great, so noble, so upright — the property of the children he was bound to defend), oh, to what depths must he have fallen! My God! what is this thing he seeks?"

"Unfortunately, dear Marguerite, wrong as he is in his relation to his family, he is right scientifically. A score of men in Europe admire him for the very thing which others count as madness. But nevertheless you must, without scruple, refuse to let him take the property of his children. Great discoveries have always been accidental. If your father ever finds the solution of the problem, it will be when it costs him nothing; in a moment, perhaps, when he despairs of it."

"My poor mother is happy," said Marguerite; "she would have suffered a thousand deaths before she died: as it was, her first encounter with Science killed her. Alas! the strife is endless."

"There is an end," said Emmanuel. "When you have nothing left, Monsieur Claës can get no further credit; then he will stop."

"Let him stop now, then," cried Marguerite, "for we are without a penny!"

Monsieur de Solis went to buy up Claës's notes and returned, bringing them to Marguerite. Balthazar, contrary to his custom, came down a few moments before dinner. For the first time in two years his daughter noticed the signs of a human grief upon his face: he was again a father, reason and judgment had overcome Science; he looked into the court-yard, then into the garden, and when certain that he was alone with his daughter, he came up to her with a look of melancholy kindness.

"My child," he said, taking her hand and pressing it with persuasive tenderness, "forgive your old father. Yes, Marguerite, I have done wrong. You spoke truly. So long as I have not *found* I am a miserable wretch. I will go away from here. I cannot see Van Claës sold," he went on, pointing to the martyr's portrait. "He died for Liberty, I die for Science; he is venerated, I am hated."

"Hated? oh, my father, no," she cried, throwing herself on his breast; "we all adore you. Do we not, Félicie?" she said, turning to her sister who came in at the moment.

"What is the matter, dear father?" said his youngest daughter, taking his hand.

"I have ruined you."

"Ah!" cried Félicie, "but our brothers will make our fortune. Jean is always at the head of his class."

"See, father," said Marguerite, leading Balthazar in a coaxing, filial way to the chimney-piece and taking some papers from beneath the clock, "here are your notes of hand; but do not sign any more, there is nothing left to pay them with—"

"Then you have money?" whispered Balthazar in her ear, when he recovered from his surprise.

His words and manner tortured the heroic girl; she saw the delirium of joy and hope in her father's face as he looked about him to discover the gold.

"Father," she said, "I have my own fortune."

"Give it to me," he said with a rapacious gesture; "I will return you a hundred-fold."

"Yes, I will give it to you," answered Marguerite, looking gravely at Balthazar, who did not know the meaning she put into her words.

"Ah, my dear daughter!" he cried, "you save my life. I have thought of a last experiment, after which nothing more is possible. If, this time, I do not find the Absolute, I must renounce the search. Come to my arms, my darling child; I will make you the happiest woman upon earth. You give me glory; you bring me back to happiness; you bestow the power to heap treasures upon my children — yes! I will load you with jewels, with wealth."

He kissed his daughter's forehead, took her hands and pressed them, and testified his joy by fondling caresses which to Marguerite seemed almost obsequious. During the dinner he thought only of her; he looked at her eagerly with the assiduous devotion displayed by a lover to his mistress: if she made a movement, he tried to divine her wish, and rose to fulfil it; he made her ashamed by the youthful eagerness of his attentions, which were painfully out of keeping with his premature old age. To all these cajoleries, Marguerite herself presented the contrast of actual distress, shown sometimes by a word of doubt, sometimes by a glance along the empty shelves of the sideboards in the dining-room.

"Well, well," he said, following her eye, "in six months we shall fill them again with gold, and marvellous things. You shall be like a queen. Bah! nature herself will belong to us, we shall rise above all created beings — through you, you, my Marguerite! Margarita," he said, smiling, "thy name is a prophecy. 'Margarita' means a pearl. Sterne says so somewhere. Did you ever read Sterne? Would you like to have a Sterne? it would amuse you."

"A pearl, they say, is the result of a disease," she answered; "we have suffered enough already."

"Do not be sad; you will make the happiness of those you love; you shall be rich and all-powerful."

"Mademoiselle has got such a good heart," said Lemulquinier, whose seamed face stretched itself painfully into a smile.

For the rest of the evening Balthazar displayed to his daughters all the natural graces of his character and the charms of his conversation. Seductive as the serpent, his lips, his eyes, poured out a magnetic fluid; he put forth that power of genius, that gentleness of spirit which once fascinated Joséphine and now drew, as it were, his daughters into his heart. When Emmanuel de Solis came he found, for the first time in many months, the father and the children reunited. The young professor, in spite of his reserve, came under the influence of the scene; for Claës's manners and conversation had recovered their former irresistible seduction!

Men of science, plunged though they be in abysses of thought and ceaselessly employed in studying the moral world, take notice, nevertheless, of the smallest details of the sphere in which they live. More out of date with their surroundings than really absent-minded, they are never in harmony with the life about them; they know and forget all; they prejudge the future in their own minds, prophesy to their own souls, know of an event before it happens, and yet they say nothing of all this. If, in the hush of meditation, they sometimes use their power to observe and recognize that which goes on around them, they are satisfied with having divined its meaning; their occupations hurry them on, and they frequently make false application of the knowledge they have acquired about the things of life. Sometimes they wake from their social apathy, or they drop from the world of thought to the world of life; at such times they come with well-stored memories, and are by no means strangers to what is happening.

Balthazar, who joined the perspicacity of the heart to that of the brain, knew his daughter's whole past; he knew, or he had guessed, the history of the hidden love that united her with Emmanuel: he now showed this delicately, and sanctioned their affection by taking part in it. It was the sweetest flattery a father could bestow, and the lovers were unable to resist it. The evening passed delightfully, — contrasting with the griefs which threatened the lives of these poor children. When Balthazar retired, after, as we may say, filling his family with light and bathing them with tenderness, Emmanuel de Solis, who had shown some embarrassment of manner, took from his pockets three thousand ducats in gold, the possession of which he had feared to betray. He placed them on the work-table, where Marguerite covered them with some linen she was mending; and then he went to his own house to fetch the rest of the money. When he returned, Félicie had gone to bed. Eleven o'clock struck; Martha, who sat up to undress her mistress, was still with Félicie.

"Where can we hide it?" said Marguerite, unable to resist the pleasure of playing with the gold ducats, — a childish amusement which proved disastrous.

"I will lift this marble pedestal, which is hollow," said Emmanuel; "you can slip in the packages, and the devil himself will not think of looking for them there."

Just as Marguerite was making her last trip but one from the work-table to the pedestal, carrying the gold, she suddenly gave a piercing cry, and let fall the packages, the covers of which broke as they fell, and the coins were scattered about the room. Her father stood at the parlor door; the avidity of his eyes terrified her.

"What are you doing?" he said, looking first at his daughter, whose terror nailed her to the floor, and then at the young man, who had hastily sprung up, — though his attitude beside the pedestal was sufficiently significant. The rattle of the gold upon the ground was horrible, the scattering of it prophetic.

"I could not be mistaken," said Balthazar, sitting down; "I heard the sound of gold."

He was not less agitated than the young people, whose hearts were beating so in unison that their throbs might be heard, like the ticking of a clock, amid the profound silence which suddenly settled on the parlor.

"Thank you, Monsieur de Solis," said Marguerite, giving Emmanuel a glance which meant, "Come to my rescue and help me to save this money."

"What gold is this?" resumed Balthazar, casting at Marguerite and Emmanuel a glance of terrible clear-sightedness.

"This gold belongs to Monsieur de Solis, who is kind enough to lend it to me that I may pay our debts honorably," she answered.

Emmanuel colored and turned as though about to leave the room: Balthazar caught him by the arm.

"Monsieur," he said, "you must not escape my thanks."

"Monsieur, you owe me none. This money belongs to Mademoiselle Marguerite, who borrows it from me on the security of her own property," Emmanuel replied, looking at his mistress, who thanked him with an almost imperceptible movement of her eyelids.

"I shall not allow that," said Claës, taking a pen and a sheet of paper from the table where Félicie did her writing, and turning to the astonished young people. "How much is it?" His eager passion made him more astute than the wiliest of rascally bailiffs: the sum was to be his. Marguerite and Monsieur de Solis hesitated.

"Let us count it," he said.

"There are six thousand ducats," said Emmanuel.

"Seventy thousand francs," remarked Claës.

The glance which Marguerite threw at her lover gave him courage.

"Monsieur," he said, "your note bears no value; pardon this purely technical term. I have to-day lent Mademoiselle Claës one hundred thousand francs to redeem your notes of hand which you had no means of paying: you are therefore unable to give me any security. These one hundred and seventy thousand francs belong to Mademoiselle Claës, who can dispose of them as she sees fit; but I have lent them on a pledge that she will sign a deed securing them to me on her share of the now denuded land of the forest of Waignies."

Marguerite turned away her head that her lover might not see the tears that gathered in her eyes. She knew Emmanuel's purity of soul. Brought up by his uncle to the practice of the sternest religious virtues, the young man had an especial horror of falsehood: after giving his heart and life to Marguerite Claës he now made her the sacrifice of his conscience.

"Adieu, monsieur," said Balthazar, "I thought you had more confidence in a man who looked upon you with the eyes of a father."

After exchanging a despairing look with Marguerite, Emmanuel was shown out by Martha, who closed and fastened the street-door.

The moment the father and daughter were alone Claës said, —

"You love me, do you not?"

"Come to the point, father. You want this money: you cannot have it."

She began to pick up the coins; her father silently helped her to gather them together and count the sum she had dropped; Marguerite allowed him to do so without manifesting the least distrust. When two thousand ducats were piled on the table, Balthazar said, with a desperate air, —

"Marguerite, I must have that money."

"If you take it, it will be robbery," she replied coldly. "Hear me, father: better kill us at one blow than make us suffer a hundred deaths a day. Let it now be seen which of us must yield."

"Do you mean to kill your father?"

"We avenge our mother," she said, pointing to the spot where Madame Claës died.

"My daughter, if you knew the truth of this matter, you would not use those words to me. Listen, and I will endeavor to explain the great problem — but no, you cannot comprehend me," he cried in accents of despair. "Come, give me the money; believe for once in your father. Yes, I know I caused your mother pain: I have dissipated — to use the word of fools — my own fortune and injured yours; I know my children are sacrificed for a thing you call madness; but my angel, my darling, my love, my Marguerite, hear me! If I do not now succeed, I will give myself up to you; I will obey you as you are bound to obey me; I will do your will; you shall take charge of all my property; I will no longer be the guardian of my children; I pledge myself to lay down my authority. I swear by your mother's memory!" he cried, shedding tears.

Marguerite turned away her head, unable to bear the sight. Claës, thinking she meant to yield, flung himself on his knees beside her.

" Marguerite, Marguerite! give it to me — give it!" he cried. " What are sixty thousand francs against eternal remorse? See, I shall die, this will kill me. Listen, my word is sacred. If I fail now I will abandon my labors; I will leave Flanders, — France even, if you demand it; I will go away and toil like a day-laborer to recover, sou by sou, the fortunes I have lost, and restore to my children all that Science has taken from them."

Marguerite tried to raise her father, but he persisted in remaining on his knees, and continued, still weeping: —

" Be tender and obedient for this last time! If I do not succeed, I will myself declare your hardness just. You shall call me a fool; you shall say I am a bad father; you may even tell me that I am ignorant and incapable. And when I hear you say those words I will kiss your hands. You may beat me, if you will, and when you strike I will bless you as the best of daughters, remembering that you have given me your blood."

" If it were my blood, my life's blood, I would give it to you," she cried; " but can I let Science cut the throats of my brothers and my sister? No. Cease,

cease!" she said, wiping her tears and pushing aside her father's caressing hands.

"Sixty thousand francs and two months," he said, rising in anger; "that is all I want: but my daughter stands between me and fame and wealth. I curse you!" he went on; "you are no daughter of mine, you are not a woman, you have no heart, you will never be a mother or a wife! — Give it to me, let me take it, my little one, my precious child, I will love you forever," — and he stretched his hand with a movement of hideous energy towards the gold.

"I am helpless against physical force; but God and the great Claës see us now," she said, pointing to the picture.

"Try to live, if you can, with your father's blood upon you," cried Balthazar, looking at her with abhorrence. He rose, glanced round the room and slowly left it. When he reached the door he turned as a beggar might have done and implored his daughter with a gesture, to which she replied by a negative motion of her head.

"Farewell, my daughter," he said, gently, "may you live happy!"

When he had disappeared, Marguerite remained in a trance which separated her from earth; she was no longer in the parlor; she lost consciousness of physical existence; she had wings, and soared amid the immensities of the moral world, where Thought contracts the limits both of Time and Space, where a divine hand lifts the veil of the Future. It seemed to her that days elapsed between each footfall of her father as he went up the stairs; then a shudder of dread went over her as she heard him enter his chamber. Guided by a presentiment which flashed into her soul with the piercing keenness of lightning, she ran up the stairway, without light, without noise, with the velocity of an arrow, and saw her father with a pistol at his head.

"Take all!" she cried, springing towards him.

She fell into a chair. Balthazar, seeing her pallor, began to weep as old men weep; he became like a child, he kissed her brow, he spoke in disconnected words, he almost danced with joy, and tried to play with her as a lover with a mistress who has made him happy.

"Enough, father, enough," she said; "remember your promise. If you do not succeed now, you pledge yourself to obey me?"

"Yes."

"Oh, mother!" she cried turning towards Madame Claës's chamber, "*you* would have given him all — would you not?"

"Sleep in peace," said Balthazar, "you are a good daughter."

"Sleep!" she said, "the nights of my youth are gone; you have made me old, father, just as you slowly withered my mother's heart."

"Poor child, would I could re-assure you by explaining the effects of the glorious experiment I have now imagined! you would then comprehend the truth."

"I comprehend our ruin," she said, leaving him.

The next morning, being a holiday, Emmanuel de Solis brought Jean to spend the day.

"Well?" he said, approaching Marguerite anxiously.

"I yielded," she replied.

"My dear life," he said, with a gesture of melancholy joy, "if you had withstood him I should greatly have admired you; but weak and feeble, I adore you!"

"Poor, poor Emmanuel; what is left for us?"

"Leave the future to me," cried the young man, with a radiant look; "we love each other, and all is well."

XIII.

Several months went by in perfect tranquillity. Monsieur de Solis made Marguerite see that her petty economies would never produce a fortune, and he advised her to live more at ease, by taking all that remained of the sum which Madame Claës had intrusted to him for the comfort and well-being of the household.

During these months Marguerite fell a prey to the anxieties which beset her mother under like circumstances. However incredulous she might be, she had come to hope in her father's genius. By an inexplicable phenomenon, many people have hope where they have no faith. Hope is the flower of Desire, faith is the fruit of Certainty. Marguerite said to herself, "If my father succeeds, we shall be happy." Claës and Lemulquinier alone said: "We shall succeed." Unhappily, from day to day the Searcher's face grew sadder. Sometimes, when he came to dinner he dared not look at his daughter; at other times he glanced at her in triumph. Marguerite employed her evenings in making young de Solis explain to her many legal points and difficulties. At last her masculine education was completed; she was evidently preparing herself to execute the plan she had resolved upon if her father were again vanquished in his duel with the Unknown (X).

About the beginning of July, Balthazar spent a whole day sitting on a bench in the garden, plunged in gloomy meditation. He gazed at the mound now bare of tulips, at the windows of his wife's chamber; he shuddered, no doubt, as he thought of all that his search had cost him: his movements betrayed that his thoughts were busy outside of Science. Marguerite brought her sewing and sat beside him for a while before dinner.

"You have not succeeded, father?"

"No, my child."

"Ah!" said Marguerite, in a gentle voice. "I will not say one word of reproach; we are both equally guilty. I only claim the fulfilment of your promise; it is surely sacred to you — you are a Claës. Your children will surround you with love and filial respect; but you now belong to me; you owe me obedience. Do not be uneasy; my reign will be gentle, and I will endeavor to bring it quickly to an end. Father, I am going to leave you for a month; I shall be busy with your affairs; for," she said, kissing him on his brow, "you are now my child. I take Martha with me; to-morrow Félicie will manage the household. The poor child is only seventeen, and she will not know how to resist you; therefore be generous, do not ask her for money; she has only enough for the barest necessaries of the household. Take courage: renounce your labors and your thoughts for three or four years. The great problem may ripen towards discovery; by that time I shall have gathered the money that is necessary to solve it, — and you will solve it. Tell me, father, your queen is clement, is she not?"

"Then all is not lost?" said the old man.

"No, not if you keep your word."

"I will obey you, my daughter," answered Claës, with deep emotion.

The next day, Monsieur Conyncks of Cambrai came to fetch his great-niece. He was in a travelling-carriage, and would only remain long enough for Marguerite and Martha to make their last arrangements. Monsieur Claës received his cousin with courtesy, but he was evidently sad and humiliated. Old Conyncks guessed his thoughts, and said with blunt frankness while they were breakfasting: —

"I have some of your pictures, cousin; I have a taste for pictures, — a ruinous passion, but we all have our manias."

"Dear uncle!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"The world declares that you are ruined, cousin; but the treasure of a Claës is there," said Conyncks, tapping his forehead, "and here," striking his heart; "don't you think so? I count upon you: and for that reason, having a few spare ducats in my wallet, I put them to use in your service."

"Ah!" cried Balthazar, "I will repay you with treasures — "

"The only treasures we possess in Flanders are patience and labor," replied Conyncks, sternly. "Our ancestor has those words engraved upon his brow," he said, pointing to the portrait of Van Claës.

Marguerite kissed her father and bade him good-by, gave her last directions to Josette and to Félicie, and started with Monsieur Conyncks for Paris. The great-uncle was a widower with one child, a daughter twelve years old, and he was possessed of an immense fortune. It was not impossible that he would take a wife; consequently, the good people of Douai believed that Mademoiselle Claës would marry her great-uncle. The rumor of this marriage reached Pierquin, and brought him back in hot haste to the House of Claës.

Great changes had taken place in the ideas of that clever speculator. For the last two years society in Douai had been divided into hostile camps. The nobility formed one circle, the bourgeoisie another; the latter naturally inimical to the former. This sudden separation took place, as a matter of fact, all over France, and divided the country into two warring nations, whose jealous squabbles, always augmenting, were among the chief reasons why the revolution of July, 1830, was accepted in the provinces. Between these social camps, the one ultra-monarchical, the other ultra-liberal, were a number of functionaries of various kinds, admitted, according to their importance, to one or the other of these circles, and who, at the moment of the fall of the legitimate power, were neutral. At the beginning of the struggle between the nobility and the bourgeoisie, the royalist "cafés" displayed an unheard-of splendor, and eclipsed the liberal "cafés" so brilliantly that these gastronomic fêtes were said to have cost the lives of some of their frequenters who, like ill-cast cannon, were unable to withstand such practice. The two societies naturally became exclusive.

Pierquin, though rich for a provincial lawyer, was excluded from aristocratic circles and driven back upon the bourgeoisie. His self-love must have suffered from the successive rebuffs which he received when he felt himself insensibly set aside by people with whom he had rubbed shoulders up to the time of this social change. He had now reached his fortieth year, the last epoch at which a man who intends to marry can think of a young wife. The matches to which he was able to aspire were all among the bourgeoisie, but ambition prompted him to enter the upper circle by means of some creditable alliance.

The isolation in which the Claës family were now living had hitherto kept them aloof from these social changes. Though Claës belonged to the old aristocracy of the province, his preoccupation of mind prevented him from sharing the class antipathies thus created. However poor a daughter of the Claës might be, she would bring to a husband the dower of social vanity so eagerly desired by all parvenus. Pierquin therefore returned to his allegiance, with the secret intention of making the necessary sacrifices to conclude a marriage which should realize all his ambitions. He kept company with Balthazar and Félicie during Marguerite's absence; but in so doing he discovered, rather late in the day, a formidable competitor in Emmanuel de Solis. The property of the deceased abbé was thought to be considerable, and to the eyes of a man who calculated all the affairs of life in figures, the young heir seemed more powerful through his money than through the seductions of the heart—as to which Pierquin never made himself uneasy. In his mind the abbé's fortune restored the de Solis name to all its pristine value. Gold and nobility of birth were two orbs which reflected lustre on one another and doubled the illumination.

The sincere affection which the young professor testified for Félicie, whom he treated as a sister, excited Pierquin's spirit of emulation. He tried to eclipse Emmanuel by mingling a fashionable jargon and sundry expressions of superficial gallantry with anxious elegies and business airs which sat more naturally on his countenance. When he declared himself disenchanted with the world he looked at Félicie, as if to let her know that she alone could reconcile him with life. Félicie, who received for the first time in her life the compliments of a man, listened to this language, always sweet however deceptive; she took emptiness for depth, and needing an object on which to fix the vague emotions of her heart, she allowed the lawyer to occupy her mind. Envious perhaps, though quite unconsciously, of the loving attentions with which Emmanuel surrounded her sister, she doubtless wished to be, like Marguerite, the object of the thoughts and cares of a man.

Pierquin readily perceived the preference which Félicie accorded him over Emmanuel, and to him it was a reason why he should persist in his attentions; so that in the end he went further than he at first intended. Emmanuel watched the beginning of this passion, false perhaps in the lawyer, artless in Félicie, whose future was at stake. Soon, little colloquies followed, a few words said in a low voice behind Emmanuel's back, trifling deceptions which give to a look or a word a meaning whose insidious sweetness may be the cause of innocent mistakes. Relying on his intimacy with Félicie, Pierquin tried to discover the secret of Marguerite's journey, and to know if it were really a question of her marriage, and whether he must renounce all hope; but, notwithstanding his clumsy cleverness in questioning them, neither Balthazar nor Félicie could give him any light, for the good reason that they were in the dark themselves: Marguerite in taking the reins of power seemed to have followed its maxims and kept silence as to her projects.

The gloomy sadness of Balthazar and his great depression made it difficult to get through the evenings. Though Emmanuel succeeded in making him play backgammon, the chemist's mind was never present; during most of the time this man, so great in intellect, seemed simply stupid. Shorn of his expectations, ashamed of having squandered three fortunes, a gambler without money, he bent beneath the weight of ruin, beneath the burden of hopes that were betrayed rather than annihilated. This man of genius, gagged by dire necessity and upbraiding himself, was a tragic spectacle, fit to touch the hearts of the most unfeeling of men. Even Pierquin could not enter without respect the presence of that caged lion, whose eyes, full of baffled power, now calmed by sadness and faded from excess of light, seemed to proffer a prayer for charity which the mouth dared not utter. Sometimes a lightning flash crossed that withered face, whose fires revived at the conception of a new experiment; then, as he looked about the parlor, Balthazar's eyes would fasten on the spot where his wife had died, a film of tears rolled like hot grains of sand across the arid pupils of his eyes, which thought had made immense, and his head fell forward on his breast. Like a Titan he had lifted the world, and the world fell on his breast and crushed him.

This gigantic grief, so manfully controlled, affected Pierquin and Emmanuel powerfully, and each felt moved at times to offer this man the necessary money to renew his search,—so contagious are the convictions of genius! Both understood how it was that Madame Claës and Marguerite had flung their all into the gulf; but reason promptly checked this impulse of their hearts, and their emotion was spent in efforts at consolation which still further embittered the anguish of the doomed Titan.

Claës never spoke of his eldest daughter, and showed no interest in her departure nor any anxiety as to her silence in not writing either to him or to Félicie. When de Solis or Pierquin asked for news of her he seemed annoyed. Did he suspect that Marguerite was working against him? Was he humiliated at having resigned the majestic rights of paternity to his own child? Had he come to love her less because she was now the father, he the child? Perhaps there were many of these reasons, many of these inexpressible feelings which float like vapors through the soul, in the mute disgrace which he laid upon Marguerite. However great may be the great men of the earth, be they known or unknown, fortunate or unfortunate in their endeavors, all have littlenesses which belong to human nature. By a double misfortune they suffer through their greatness not less than through their defects; and perhaps Balthazar needed to grow accustomed to the pangs of wounded vanity. The life he was leading, the evenings when these four persons met together in Marguerite's absence, were full of sadness and vague, uneasy apprehensions. The days were barren like a parched-up soil; where, nevertheless a few flowers grew, a few rare consolations, though without Marguerite, the soul, the hope, the strength of the family, the atmosphere seemed misty.

Two months went by in this way, during which Balthazar awaited the return of his daughter. Marguerite was brought back to Douai by her uncle who remained at the house instead of returning to Cambrai, no doubt to lend the weight of his authority to some *coup d' état* planned by his niece. Marguerite's return was made a family fête. Pierquin and Monsieur de Solis were invited to dinner by Félicie and Balthazar. When the travelling-carriage stopped before the house, the four went to meet it with demonstrations of joy. Marguerite seemed happy to see her home once more, and her eyes filled with tears as she crossed the court-yard to reach the parlor. When embracing her father she colored like a guilty wife who is unable to dissimulate; but her face recovered its serenity as she looked at Emmanuel, from whom she seemed to gather strength to complete a work she had secretly undertaken.

Notwithstanding the gayety which animated all present during the dinner, father and daughter watched each other with distrust and curiosity. Balthazar asked his daughter no questions as to her stay in Paris, doubtless to preserve his parental dignity. Emmanuel de Solis imitated his reserve; but Pierquin, accustomed to be told all family secrets, said to Marguerite, concealing his curiosity under a show of liveliness: —

"Well, my dear cousin, you have seen Paris and the theatres —"

"I have seen little of Paris," she said; "I did not go there for amusement. The days went by sadly, I was so impatient to see Douai once more."

"Yes, if I had not been angry about it she would not have gone to the Opera; and even there she was uneasy," said Monsieur Conyncks.

It was a painful evening; every one was embarrassed and smiled vaguely with the artificial gayety which hides such real anxieties. Marguerite and Balthazar were a prey to cruel, latent fears which reacted on the rest. As the hours passed, the bearing of the father and daughter grew more and more constrained. Sometimes Marguerite tried to smile, but her motions, her looks, the tones of her voice betrayed a keen anxiety. Messieurs Conyncks and de Solis seemed to know the meaning of the secret feelings which agitated the noble girl, and they appeared to encourage her by expressive glances.

Balthazar, hurt at being kept from a knowledge of the steps that had been taken on his behalf, withdrew little by little from his children and friends, and pointedly kept silence. Marguerite would no doubt soon disclose what she had decided upon for his future.

To a great man, to a father, the situation was intolerable. At his age a man no longer dissimulates in his own family; he became more and more thoughtful, serious, and grieved as the hour approached when he would be forced to meet his civil death. This evening covered one of those crises in the inner life of man which can only be expressed by imagery. The thunder-clouds were gathering in the sky, people were laughing in the fields; all felt the heat and knew the storm was coming, but they held up their heads and continued on their way. Monsieur Conyncks was the first to leave the room, conducted by Balthazar to his chamber. During the latter's absence Pierquin and Monsieur de Solis went away. Marguerite bade the notary good-night with much affection; she said nothing to Emmanuel, but she pressed his hand and gave him a tearful glance. She sent Félicie away, and when Claës returned to the parlor he found his daughter alone.

"My kind father," she said in a trembling voice, "nothing could have made me leave home but the serious position in which we found ourselves; but now, after much anxiety, after surmounting the greatest difficulties, I return with some chances of deliverance for all of us. Thanks to your name, and to my uncle's influence, and to the support of Monsieur de Solis, we have obtained for you an appointment under government as receiver of customs in Bretagne; the place is worth, they say, eighteen to twenty thousand francs a year. Our uncle has given bonds as your security. Here is the nomination," she added, drawing a paper from her bag. "Your life in Douai, in this house, during the coming years of privation and sacrifice would be intolerable to you. Our father must be placed in a situation at least equal to that in which he has always lived. I ask nothing from the salary you will receive from this appointment; employ it as you see fit. I will only beg you to remember that we have not a penny of income, and that we must live on what Gabriel can give us out of his. The town shall know nothing of our inner life. If you were still to live in this house you would be an obstacle to the means my sister and I are about to employ to restore comfort and ease to the home. Have I abused the authority you gave me by putting you in a position to remake your own fortune? In a few years, if you so will, you can easily become the receiver-general."

"In other words, Marguerite," said Balthazar, gently, "you turn me out of my own house."

"I do not deserve that bitter reproach," replied the daughter, quelling the tumultuous beatings of her heart. "You will come back to us when you are able to live in your native town in a manner becoming to your dignity. Besides, father, I have your promise. You are bound to obey me. My uncle has stayed here that he might himself accompany you to Bretagne, and not leave you to make the journey alone."

"I shall not go," said Balthazar, rising; "I need no help from any one to restore my property and pay what I owe to my children."

"It would be better, certainly," replied Marguerite, calmly. "But now I ask you to reflect on our respective situations, which I will explain in a few words. If you stay in this house your children will leave it, so that you may remain its master."

"Marguerite!" cried Balthazar.

"In that case," she said, continuing her words without taking notice of her father's anger, "it will be necessary to notify the minister of your refusal, if you decide not to accept this honorable and lucrative post, which, in spite of our many efforts, we should never have obtained but for certain thousand-franc notes my uncle slipped into the glove of a lady."

"My children leave me!" he exclaimed.

"You must leave us or we must leave you," she said. "If I were your only child, I should do as my mother did, without murmuring against my fate; but my brothers and my sister shall not perish beside you with hunger and despair. I promised it to her who died there," she said, pointing to the place where her mother's bed had stood. "We have hidden our troubles from you; we have suffered in silence; our strength is gone. My father, we are not on the edge of an abyss, we are at the bottom of it. Courage is not sufficient to drag us out of it; our efforts must not be incessantly brought to nought by the caprices of a passion."

"My dear children," cried Balthazar, seizing Marguerite's hand, "I will help you, I will work, I —"

"Here is the means," she answered, showing him the official letter.

"But, my darling, the means you offer me are too slow; you make me lose the fruits of ten years' work, and the enormous sums of money which my laboratory represents. There," he said, pointing towards the garret, "are our real resources."

Marguerite walked towards the door, saying, —

"Father, you must choose."

"Ah! my daughter, you are very hard," he replied, sitting down in an armchair and allowing her to leave him.

The next morning, on coming downstairs, Marguerite learned from Lemulquinier that Monsieur Claës had gone out. This simple announcement turned her pale;

her face was so painfully significant that the old valet remarked hastily: —

"Don't be troubled, mademoiselle; monsieur said he would be back at eleven o'clock to breakfast. He did n't go to bed all night. At two in the morning he was still standing in the parlor, looking through the window at the laboratory. I was waiting up in the kitchen; I saw him; he wept; he is in trouble. Here 's the famous month of July when the sun is able to enrich us all, and if you only would — "

"Enough," said Marguerite, divining the thoughts that must have assailed her father's mind.

A phenomenon which often takes possession of persons leading sedentary lives had seized upon Balthazar; his life depended, so to speak, on the places with which it was identified; his thought was so wedded to his laboratory and to the house he lived in that both were indispensable to him, — just as the Bourse becomes a necessity to a stock-gambler, to whom the public holidays are so much lost time. Here were his hopes; here the heavens contained the only atmosphere in which his lungs could breathe the breath of life. This alliance of places and things with men, which is so powerful in feeble natures, becomes almost tyrannical in men of science and students. To leave his house was, for Balthazar, to renounce Science, to abandon the Problem, — it was death.

Marguerite was a prey to anxiety until the breakfast hour. The former scene in which Balthazar had meant to kill himself came back to her memory, and she feared some tragic end to the desperate situation in which her father was placed. She came and went restlessly about the parlor, and quivered every time the bell or the street-door sounded.

At last Balthazar returned. As he crossed the courtyard Marguerite studied his face anxiously and could see nothing but an expression of stormy grief. When he entered the parlor she went towards him to bid him good-morning; he caught her affectionately round the waist, pressed her to his heart, kissed her brow, and whispered, —

"I have been to get my passport."

The tones of his voice, his resigned look, his feeble movements, crushed the poor girl's heart; she turned away her head to conceal her tears, and then, unable to repress them, she went into the garden to weep at her ease. During breakfast, Balthazar showed the cheerfulness of a man who had come to a decision.

"So we are to start for Bretagne, uncle," he said to Monsieur Conyncks. "I have always wished to go there."

"It is a place where one can live cheaply," replied the old man.

"Is our father going away?" cried Félicie.

Monsieur de Solis entered, bringing Jean.

"You must leave him with me to-day," said Balthazar, putting his son beside him. "I am going away to-morrow, and I want to bid him good-by."

Emmanuel glanced at Marguerite, who held down her head. It was a gloomy day for the family; every one was sad, and tried to repress both thoughts and tears. This was not an absence, it was an exile. All instinctively felt the humiliation of the father in thus publicly declaring his ruin by accepting an office and leaving his family, at Balthazar's age. At this crisis he was great, while Marguerite was firm; he seemed to accept nobly the punishment of faults which the tyrannous power of genius had forced him to commit. When the evening was over, and father and daughter were again alone, Balthazar, who throughout the day had shown himself tender and affectionate as in the first years of his fatherhood, held out his hand and said to Marguerite with a tenderness that was mingled with despair, —

"Are you satisfied with your father?"

"You are worthy of *him*," said Marguerite, pointing to the portrait of Van Claës.

The next morning Balthazar, followed by Lemulquinier, went up to the laboratory, as if to bid farewell to the hopes he had so fondly cherished, and which in that scene of his toil were living things to him.

Master and man looked at each other sadly as they entered the garret they were about to leave, perhaps forever. Balthazar gazed at the various instruments over which his thoughts so long had brooded; each was connected with some experiment or some research. He sadly ordered Lemulquinier to evaporate the gases and the dangerous acids, and to separate all substances which might produce explosions. While taking these precautions, he gave way to bitter regrets, like those uttered by a condemned man before going to the scaffold.

"Here," he said, stopping before a china capsule in which two wires of a voltaic pile were dipped, "is an experiment whose results ought to be watched. If it succeeds — dreadful thought! — my children will have driven from their home a father who could fling diamonds at their feet. In a combination of carbon and sulphur," he went on, speaking to himself, "carbon plays the part of an electro-positive substance; the crystallization ought to begin at the negative pole; and in case of decomposition, the carbon would crop into crystals —"

"Ah! is that how it would be?" said Lemulquinier, contemplating his master with admiration.

"Now here," continued Balthazar, after a pause, "the combination is subject to the influence of the galvanic battery which may act —"

"If monsieur wishes, I can increase its force."

"No, no; leave it as it is. Perfect stillness and time are the conditions of crystallization — "

"Confound it, it takes time enough, that crystallization," cried the old valet impatiently.

"If the temperature goes down, the sulphide of carbon will crystallize," said Balthazar, continuing to give forth shreds of indistinct thoughts which were parts of a complete conception in his own mind; "but if the battery works under certain conditions of which I am ignorant — it must be watched carefully — it is quite possible that — Ah! what am I thinking of? It is no longer a question of chemistry, my friend; we are to keep accounts in Bretagne."

Claës rushed precipitately from the laboratory, and went downstairs to take a last breakfast with his family, at which Pierquin and Monsieur de Solis were present. Balthazar, hastening to end the agony Science had imposed upon him, bade his children farewell and got into the carriage with his uncle, all the family accompanying him to the threshold. There, as Marguerite strained her father to her breast with a despairing pressure, he whispered in her ear, "You are a good girl; I bear you no ill-will;" then she darted through the court-yard into the parlor, and flung herself on her knees upon the spot where her mother had died, and prayed to God to give her strength to accomplish the hard task that lay before her. She was already strengthened by an inward voice, sounding in her heart the encouragement of angels and the gratitude of her mother, when her sister, her brother, Emmanuel, and Pierquin came in, after watching the carriage until it disappeared.

XIV.

"And now, mademoiselle, what do you intend to do!" said Pierquin.

"Save the family," she answered simply. "We own nearly thirteen hundred acres at Waignies. I intend to clear them, divide them into three farms, put up the necessary buildings, and then let them. I believe that in a few years, with patience and great economy, each of us," motioning to her sister and brother, "will have a farm of over four hundred acres, which may bring in, some day, a rental of nearly fifteen thousand francs. My brother Gabriel will have this house, and all that now stands in his name on the Grand-Livre, for his portion. We shall then be able to redeem our father's property and return it to him free from all encumbrance, by devoting our incomes, each of us, to paying off his debts."

"But, my dear cousin," said the lawyer, amazed at Marguerite's understanding of business and her cool judgment, "you will need at least two hundred thousand francs to clear the land, build your houses, and purchase cattle. Where will you get such a sum?"

"That is where my difficulties begin," she said, looking alternately at Pierquin and de Solis; "I cannot ask it from my uncle, who has already spent much money for us and has given bonds as my father's security."

"You have friends!" cried Pierquin, suddenly perceiving that the demoiselles Claës were "four-hundred-thousand-franc girls," after all.

Emmanuel de Solis looked tenderly at Marguerite. Pierquin, unfortunately for himself, was a notary still, even in the midst of his enthusiasm, and he promptly added, —

"I will lend you these two hundred thousand francs."

Marguerite and Emmanuel consulted each other with a glance which was a flash of light to Pierquin; Félicie colored highly, much gratified to find her cousin as generous as she desired him to be. She looked at her sister, who suddenly guessed the fact that during her absence the poor girl had allowed herself to be caught by Pierquin's meaningless gallantries.

"You shall only pay me five per cent interest," went on the lawyer, "and refund the money whenever it is convenient to do so; I will take a mortgage on your property. And don't be uneasy; you shall only have the outlay on your improvements to pay; I will find you trustworthy farmers, and do all your business gratuitously, so as to help you like a good relation."

Emmanuel made Marguerite a sign to refuse the offer, but she was too much occupied in studying the changes of her sister's face to perceive it. After a slight pause, she looked at the notary with an amused smile, and answered of her own accord, to the great joy of Monsieur de Solis: —

"You are indeed a good relation, — I expected nothing less of you; but an interest of five per cent would delay our release too long. I shall wait till my brother is of age, and then we will sell out what he has in the Funds."

Pierquin bit his lip. Emmanuel smiled quietly.

"Félicie, my dear child, take Jean back to school; Martha will go with you," said Marguerite to her sister. "Jean, my angel, be a good boy; don't tear your clothes, for we shall not be rich enough to buy you as many new ones as we did. Good-by, little one; study hard."

Félicie carried off her brother.

"Cousin," said Marguerite to Pierquin, "and you, monsieur," she said to Monsieur de Solis, "I know you have been to see my father during my absence, and I thank you for that proof of friendship. You will not do less I am sure for two poor girls who will be in need of counsel. Let us understand each other. When I am at home I shall receive you both with the greatest pleasure, but when Félicie is here alone with Josette and Martha, I need not tell you that she ought to see no one, not even an old friend or the most devoted of relatives. Under the circumstances in which we are placed, our conduct must be irreproachable. We are vowed to toil and solitude for a long, long time."

There was silence for some minutes. Emmanuel, absorbed in contemplation of Marguerite's head, seemed dumb. Pierquin did not know what to say. He took leave of his cousin with feelings of rage against himself; for he suddenly perceived that Marguerite loved Emmanuel, and that he, Pierquin, had just behaved like a fool.

"Pierquin, my friend," he said, apostrophizing himself in the street, "if a man said you were an idiot he would tell the truth. What a fool I am! I've got twelve thousand francs a year outside of my business, without counting what I am to inherit from my uncle des Racquets, which is likely to double my fortune (not that I wish him dead, he is so economical), and I've had the madness to ask interest from Mademoiselle Claës! I know those two are jeering at me now! I must n't think of Marguerite any more. No. After all, Félicie is a sweet, gentle little creature, who will suit me much better. Marguerite's character is iron; she would want to rule me — and — she would rule me. Come, come, let's be generous; I wish I was not so much of a lawyer: am I never to get that harness off my back? Bless my soul! I'll begin to fall in love with Félicie, and I won't budge from that sentiment. She will have a farm of four hundred and thirty acres, which, sooner or later, will be worth twelve or fifteen thousand francs a year, for the soil about Waignies is excellent. Just let my old uncle des Racquets die, poor dear man, and I 'll sell my practice and be a man of leisure, with fifty — thou — sand — francs — a — year. My wife is a Claës, I 'm allied to the great families. The deuce! we 'll see if those Courtevilles and Magalhens and Savaron de Savarus will refuse to come and dine with a Pierquin-Claës-Molina-Nourho. I shall be mayor of Douai; I 'll obtain the cross, and get to be deputy — in short, everything. Ha, ha! Pierquin, my boy, now keep yourself in hand; no more nonsense, because — yes, on my word of honor — Félicie — Mademoiselle Félicie Van Claës — loves you!"

When the lovers were left alone Emmanuel held out his hand to Marguerite, who did not refuse to put her right hand into it. They rose with one impulse and moved towards their bench in the garden; but as they reached the middle of the parlor, the lover could not resist his joy, and, in a voice that trembled with emotion, he said, —

"I have three hundred thousand francs of yours."

"What!" she cried, "did my poor mother intrust them to you? No? then where did you get them."

"Oh, my Marguerite! all that is mine is yours. Was it not you who first said the word 'ourselves'?"

"Dear Emmanuel!" she exclaimed, pressing the hand which still held hers; and then, instead of going into the garden, she threw herself into a low chair.

"It is for me to thank you," he said, with the voice of love, "since you accept all."

"Oh, my dear beloved one," she cried, "this moment effaces many a grief and brings the happy future nearer. Yes, I accept your fortune," she continued, with the smile of an angel upon her lips, "I know the way to make it mine."

She looked up at the picture of Van Claës as if calling him to witness. The young man's eyes followed those of Marguerite, and he did not notice that she took a ring from her finger until he heard the words: —

"From the depths of our greatest misery one comfort rises. My father's indifference leaves me the free disposal of myself," she said, holding out the ring. "Take it, Emmanuel. My mother valued you — she would have chosen you."

The young man turned pale with emotion and fell on his knees beside her, offering in return a ring which he always wore.

"This is my mother's wedding-ring," he said, kissing it. "My Marguerite, am I to have no other pledge than this?"

She stooped a little till her forehead met his lips.

"Alas, dear love," she said, greatly agitated, "are we not doing wrong? We have so long to wait!"

"My uncle used to say that adoration was the daily bread of patience, — he spoke of Christians who love God. That is how I love you; I have long mingled my love for you with my love for Him. I am yours as I am His."

They remained for a few moments in the power of this sweet enthusiasm. It was the calm, sincere effusion of a feeling which, like an overflowing spring, poured forth its superabundance in little wavelets. The events which separated these lovers produced a melancholy which only made their happiness the keener, giving it a sense of something sharp, like pain.

Félicie came back too soon. Emmanuel, inspired by that delightful tact of love which discerns all feelings, left the sisters alone, — exchanging a look with Marguerite to let her know how much this discretion cost him, how hungry his soul was for that happiness so long desired, which had just been consecrated by the betrothal of their hearts.

"Come here, little sister," said Marguerite, taking Félicie round the neck. Then, passing into the garden they sat down on the bench where generation after generation had confided to listening hearts their words of love, their sighs of grief, their meditations and their projects. In spite of her sister's joyous tone and lively manner, Félicie experienced a sensation that was very like fear. Marguerite took her hand and felt it tremble.

"Mademoiselle Félicie," said the elder, with her lips at her sister's ear. "I read your soul. Pierquin has been here often in my absence, and he has said sweet words to you, and you have listened to them." Félicie blushed. "Don't defend yourself, my angel," continued Marguerite, "it is so natural to love! Perhaps your dear nature will improve his; he is egotistical and self-interested, but for all that he is a good man, and his defects may even add to your happiness. He will love you as the best of his possessions; you will be a part of his business affairs. Forgive me this one word, dear love; you will soon correct the bad habit he has acquired of seeing money in everything, by teaching him the business of the heart."

Félicie could only kiss her sister.

"Besides," added Marguerite, "he has property; and his family belongs to the highest and the oldest bourgeoisie. But you don't think I would oppose your happiness even if the conditions were less prosperous, do you?"

Félicie let fall the words, "Dear sister."

"Yes, you may confide in me," cried Marguerite, "sisters can surely tell each other their secrets."

These words, so full of heartiness, opened the way to one of those delightful conversations in which young girls tell all. When Marguerite, expert in love, reached an understanding of the real state of Félicie's heart, she wound up their talk by saying: —

"Well, dear child, let us make sure he truly loves you, and — then —"

"Ah!" cried Félicie, laughing, "leave me to my own devices; I have a model before my eyes."

"Saucy child!" exclaimed Marguerite, kissing her.

Though Pierquin belonged to the class of men who regard marriage as the accomplishment of a social duty and the means of transmitting property, and though he was indifferent to which sister he should marry so long as both had the same name and the same dower, he did perceive that the two were, to use his own expression, "romantic and sentimental girls," adjectives employed by commonplace people to ridicule the gifts which Nature sows with grudging hand along the furrows of humanity. The lawyer no doubt said to himself that he had better swim with the stream; and accordingly the next day he came to see Marguerite, and took her mysteriously into the little garden, where he began to talk sentiment, — that being one of the clauses of the primal contract which, according to social usage, must precede the notarial contract.

"Dear cousin," he said, "you and I have not always been of one mind as to the best means of bringing your affairs to a happy conclusion; but you do now, I am sure, admit that I have always been guided by a great desire to be useful to you. Well, yesterday I spoiled my offer by a fatal habit which the legal profession forces upon us—you understand me? My heart did not share in the folly. I have loved you well; but I have a certain perspicacity, legal perhaps, which obliges me to see that I do not please you. It is my own fault; another has been more successful than I. Well, I come now to tell you, like an honest man, that I sincerely love your sister Félicie. Treat me therefore as a brother; accept my purse, take what you will from it,—the more you take the better you prove your regard for me. I am wholly at your service—*without interest*, you understand, neither at twelve nor at one quarter per cent. Let me be thought worthy of Félicie, that is all I ask. Forgive my defects; they come from business habits; my heart is good, and I would fling myself into the Scarpe sooner than not make my wife happy."

"This is all satisfactory, cousin," answered Marguerite; "but my sister's choice depends upon herself and also on my father's will."

"I know that, my dear cousin," said the lawyer, "but you are the mother of the whole family; and I have nothing more at heart than that you should judge me rightly."

This conversation paints the mind of the honest notary. Later in life, Pierquin became celebrated by his reply to the commanding officer at Saint-Omer, who had invited him to be present at a military fête; the note ran as follows: "Monsieur Pierquin-Claës de Molina-Nourho, mayor of the city of Douai, chevalier of the Legion of honor, will have *that* of being present, etc."

Marguerite accepted the lawyer's offer only so far as it related to his professional services, so that she might not in any degree compromise either her own dignity as a woman, or her sister's future, or her father's authority.

The next day she confided Félicie to the care of Martha and Josette (who vowed themselves body and soul to their young mistress, and seconded all her economies), and started herself for Waignies, where she began operations, which were judiciously overlooked and directed by Pierquin. Devotion was now set down as a good speculation in the mind of that worthy man; his care and trouble were in fact an investment, and he had no wish to be niggardly in making it. First he contrived to save Marguerite the trouble of clearing the land and working the ground intended for the farms. He found three young men, sons of rich farmers, who were anxious to settle themselves in life, and he succeeded, through the prospect he held out to them of the fertility of the land, in making them take leases of the three farms on which the buildings were to be constructed. To gain possession of the farms rent-free for three years the tenants bound themselves to pay ten thousand francs a year the fourth year, twelve thousand the sixth year, and fifteen thousand for the remainder of the term; to drain the land, make the plantations, and purchase the cattle. While the buildings were being put up the farmers were to clear the land.

Four years after Balthazar Claës's departure from his home Marguerite had almost recovered the property of her brothers and sister. Two hundred thousand francs, lent to her by Emmanuel, had sufficed to put up the farm buildings. Neither help nor counsel was withheld from the brave girl, whose conduct excited the admiration of the whole town. Marguerite superintended the buildings, and looked after her contracts and leases with the good sense, activity, and perseverance, which women know so well how to call up when they are actuated by a strong sentiment. By the fifth year she was able to apply thirty thousand francs from the rental of the farms, together with the income from the Funds standing in her brother's name, and the proceeds of her father's property, towards paying off the mortgages on that property and repairing the devastation which her father's passion had wrought in the old mansion of the Claës. This redemption went on more rapidly as the interest account decreased. Emmanuel de Solis persuaded Marguerite to take the remaining one hundred thousand francs of his uncle's bequest, and by joining to it twenty thousand francs of his own savings, pay off in the third year of her management a large slice of the debts. This life of courage, privation, and endurance was never relaxed for five years; but all went well, — everything prospered under the administration and influence of Marguerite Claës.

Gabriel, now holding an appointment under government as engineer in the department of Roads and Bridges, made a rapid fortune, aided by his great-uncle, in a canal which he was able to construct; moreover, he succeeded in pleasing his cousin Mademoiselle Conyncks, the idol of her father, and one of the richest heiresses in Flanders. In 1824 the whole Claës property was free, and the house in the rue de Paris had repaired its losses. Pierquin made a formal application to Balthazar for the hand of Félicie, and Monsieur de Solis did the same for that of Marguerite.

At the beginning of January, 1825, Marguerite and Monsieur Conyncks left Douai to bring home the exiled father, whose return was eagerly desired by all, and who had sent in his resignation that he might return to his family and crown their happiness by his presence. Marguerite had often expressed a regret at not being able to replace the pictures which had formerly adorned the gallery and the reception-rooms, before the day when her father would return as master of his house. In her absence Pierquin and Monsieur de Solis plotted with Félicie to prepare a surprise which should make the younger sister a sharer in the restoration of the House of Claës. The two bought a number of fine pictures, which they presented to Félicie to decorate the gallery. Monsieur Conyncks had thought of the same thing. Wishing to testify to Marguerite the satisfaction he had taken in her noble conduct and in the self-devotion with which she had fulfilled her mother's dying mandate, he arranged that fifty of his fine pictures, among them several of those which Balthazar had formerly sold, should be brought to Douai in Marguerite's absence, so that the Claës gallery might once more be complete.

During the years that had elapsed since Balthazar Claës left his home, Marguerite had visited her father several times, accompanied by her sister or by Jean. Each time she had found him more and more changed; but since her last visit old age had come upon Balthazar with alarming symptoms, the gravity of which was much increased by the parsimony with which he lived that he might spend the greater part of his salary in experiments the results of which forever disappointed him. Though he was only sixty-five years of age, he appeared to be eighty. His eyes were sunken in their orbits, his eyebrows had whitened, only a few hairs remained as a fringe around his skull; he allowed his beard to grow, and cut it off with scissors when its length annoyed him; he was bent like a field-laborer, and the condition of his clothes had reached a degree of wretchedness which his decrepitude now rendered hideous. Thought still animated that noble face, whose features were scarcely discernible under its wrinkles; but the fixity of the eyes, a certain desperation of manner, a restless uneasiness, were all diagnostics of insanity, or rather of many forms of insanity. Sometimes a flash of hope gave him the look of a monomaniac; at other times impatient anger at not seizing a secret which flitted before his eyes like a will o' the wisp brought symptoms of madness into his face; or sudden bursts of maniacal laughter betrayed his irrationality: but during the greater part of the time, he was sunk in a state of complete depression which combined all the phases of insanity in the cold melancholy of an idiot. However fleeting and imperceptible these symptoms may have been to the eye of strangers, they were, unfortunately, only too plain to those who had known Balthazar Claës sublime in goodness, noble in heart, stately in person, — a Claës of whom, alas, scarcely a vestige now remained.

Lemulquinier, grown old and wasted like his master with incessant toil, had not, like him, been subjected to the ravages of thought. The expression of the old valet's face showed a singular mixture of anxiety and admiration for his master which might easily have misled an onlooker. Though he listened to Balthazar's words with respect, and followed his every movement with tender solicitude, he took charge of the servant of science very much as a mother takes care of her child, and even seemed to protect him, because in the vulgar details of life, to which Balthazar gave no thought, he actually did protect him. These old men, wrapped in one idea, confident of the reality of their hope, stirred by the same breath, the one representing the shell, the other the soul of their mutual existence, formed a spectacle at once tender and distressing.

When Marguerite and Monsieur de Conyncks arrived, they found Claës living at an inn. His successor had not been kept waiting, and was already in possession of his office.

XV.

Through all the preoccupations of science, the desire to see his native town, his house, his family, agitated Balthazar's mind. His daughter's letters had told him of the happy family events; he dreamed of crowning his career by a series of experiments that must lead to the solution of the great Problem, and he awaited Marguerite's arrival with extreme impatience.

The daughter threw herself into her father's arms and wept for joy. This time she came to seek a recompense for years of pain, and pardon for the exercise of her domestic authority. She seemed to herself criminal, like those great men who violate the liberties of the people for the safety of the nation. But she shuddered as she now contemplated her father and saw the change which had taken place in him since her last visit. Monsieur Conyncks shared the secret alarm of his niece, and insisted on taking Balthazar as soon as possible to Douai, where the influence of his native place might restore him to health and reason amid the happiness of a recovered domestic life.

After the first transports of the heart were over, — which were far warmer on Balthazar's part than Marguerite had expected, — he showed a singular state of feeling towards his daughter. He expressed regret at receiving her in a miserable inn, inquired her tastes and wishes, and asked what she would have to eat, with the eagerness of a lover; his manner was even that of a culprit seeking to propitiate a judge.

Marguerite knew her father so well that she guessed the motive of this solicitude; she felt sure he had contracted debts in the town which he wished to pay before his departure. She observed him carefully for a time, and saw the human heart in all its nakedness. Balthazar had dwindled from his true self. The consciousness of his abasement, and the isolation of his life in the pursuit of science made him timid and childish in all matters not connected with his favorite occupations. His daughter awed him; the remembrance of her past devotion, of the energy she had displayed, of the powers he had allowed her to take away from him, of the wealth now at her command, and the indefinable feelings that had preyed upon him ever since the day when he had abdicated a paternity he had long neglected, — all these things affected his mind towards her, and increased her importance in his eyes. Conyncks was nothing to him beside Marguerite; he saw only his daughter, he thought only of her, and seemed to fear her, as certain weak husbands fear a superior woman who rules them. When he raised his eyes and looked at her, Marguerite noticed with distress an expression of fear, like that of a child detected in a fault. The noble girl was unable to reconcile the majestic and terrible expression of that bald head, denuded by science and by toil, with the puerile smile, the eager servility exhibited on the lips and countenance of the old man. She suffered from the contrast of that greatness to that littleness, and resolved to use her utmost influence to restore her father's sense of dignity before the solemn day on which he was to reappear in the bosom of his family. Her first step when they were alone was to ask him, —

"Do you owe anything here?"

Balthazar colored, and replied with an embarrassed air: —

"I don't know, but Lemulquinier can tell you. That worthy fellow knows more about my affairs than I do myself."

Marguerite rang for the valet: when he came she studied, almost involuntarily, the faces of the two old men.

"What does monsieur want?" asked Lemulquinier.

Marguerite, who was all pride and dignity, felt an oppression at her heart as she perceived from the tone and manner of the servant that some mortifying familiarity had grown up between her father and the companion of his labors.

"My father cannot make out the account of what he owes in this place without you," she said.

"Monsieur," began Lemulquinier, "owes — "

At these words Balthazar made a sign to his valet which Marguerite intercepted; it humiliated her.

"Tell me all that my father owes," she said.

"Monsieur owes, here, about three thousand francs to an apothecary who is a wholesale dealer in drugs; he has supplied us with pearl-ash and lead, and zinc and the reagents — "

"Is that all?" asked Marguerite.

Again Balthazar made a sign to Lemulquinier, who replied, as if under a spell, —

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Very good," she said, "I will give them to you."

Balthazar kissed her joyously and said, —

"You are an angel, my child."

He breathed at his ease and glanced at her with eyes that were less sad; and yet, in spite of this apparent joy, Marguerite easily detected the signs of deep anxiety upon his face, and felt certain that the three thousand francs represented only the pressing debts of his laboratory.

"Be frank with me, father," she said, letting him seat her on his knee; "you owe more than that. Tell me all, and come back to your home without an element of fear in the midst of the general joy."

"My dear Marguerite," he said, taking her hands and kissing them with a grace that seemed a memory of his youth, "you would scold me —"

"No," she said.

"Truly?" he asked, giving way to childish expressions of delight. "Can I tell you all? will you pay —"

"Yes," she said, repressing the tears which came into her eyes.

"Well, I owe — oh! I dare not —"

"Tell me, father."

"It is a great deal."

She clasped her hands, with a gesture of despair.

"I owe thirty thousand francs to Messieurs Protez and Chiffreville."

"Thirty thousand francs," she said, "is just the sum I have laid by. I am glad to give it to you," she added, respectfully kissing his brow.

He rose, took his daughter in his arms and whirled about the room, dancing her as though she were an infant; then he placed her in the chair where she had been sitting, and exclaimed: —

"My darling child! my treasure of love! I was half-dead: the Chiffrevilles have written me three threatening letters; they were about to sue me, — me, who would have made their fortune!"

"Father," said Marguerite in accents of despair, "are you still searching?"

"Yes, still searching," he said, with the smile of a madman, "and I shall FIND. If you could only understand the point we have reached —"

"We? who are we?"

"I mean Mulquinier: he has understood me, he loves me. Poor fellow! he is devoted to me."

Conyncks entered at the moment and interrupted the conversation. Marguerite made a sign to her father to say no more, fearing lest he should lower himself in her uncle's eyes. She was frightened at the ravages thought had made in that noble mind, absorbed in searching for the solution of a problem that was perhaps insoluble. Balthazar, who saw and knew nothing outside of his furnaces, seemed not to realize the liberation of his fortune.

On the morrow they started for Flanders. During the journey Marguerite gained some confused light upon the position in which Lemulquinier and her father stood to each other. The valet had acquired an ascendency over his master such as common men without education are able to obtain over great minds to whom they feel themselves necessary; such men, taking advantage of concession after concession, aim at complete dominion with the persistency that comes of a fixed idea. In this case the master had contracted for the man the sort of affection that grows out of habit, like that of a workman for his creative tool, or an Arab for the horse that gives him freedom. Marguerite studied the signs of this tyranny, resolving to withdraw her father from its humiliating yoke if it were real.

They stopped several days in Paris on the way home, to enable Marguerite to pay off her father's debts and request the manufacturers of chemical products to send nothing to Douai without first informing her of any orders given by Claës. She persuaded her father to change his style of dress and buy clothes that were suitable to a man of his station. This corporal restoration gave Balthazar a certain physical dignity which augured well for a change in his ideas; and Marguerite, joyous in the thought of all the surprises that awaited her father when he entered his own house, started for Douai.

Nine miles from the town Balthazar was met by Félicie on horseback, escorted by her two brothers, Emmanuel, Pierquin, and some of the nearest friends of the three families. The journey had necessarily diverted the chemist's mind from its habitual thoughts; the aspect of his own Flanders acted on his heart; when, therefore, he saw the joyous company of his family and friends gathering about him his emotion was so keen that the tears came to his eyes, his voice trembled, his eyelids reddened, and he held his children in so passionate an embrace, seeming unable to release them, that the spectators of the scene were moved to tears.

When at last he saw the House of Claës he turned pale, and sprang from the carriage with the agility of a young man; he breathed the air of the court-yard with delight, and looked about him at the smallest details with a pleasure that could express itself only in gestures: he drew himself erect, and his whole countenance renewed its youth. The tears came into his eyes when he entered the parlor and noticed the care with which his daughter had replaced the old silver candelabra that he formerly had sold, — a visible sign that all the other disasters had been repaired. Breakfast was served in the dining-room, whose sideboards and shelves were covered with curios and silver-ware not less valuable than the treasures that formerly stood there. Though the family meal lasted a long time, it was still too short for the narratives which Balthazar exacted from each of his children. The reaction of his moral being caused by this return to his home wedded him once more to family happiness, and he was again a father. His manners recovered their former dignity. At first the delight of recovering possession kept him from dwelling on the means by which the recovery had been brought about. His joy therefore was full and unalloyed.

Breakfast over, the four children, the father and Pierquin went into the parlor, where Balthazar saw with some uneasiness a number of legal papers which the notary's clerk had laid upon a table, by which he was standing as if to assist his chief. The children all sat down, and Balthazar, astonished, remained standing before the fireplace.

"This," said Pierquin, "is the guardianship account which Monsieur Claës renders to his children. It is not very amusing," he added, laughing after the manner of notaries who generally assume a lively tone in speaking of serious matters, "but I must really oblige you to listen to it."

Though the phrase was natural enough under the circumstances, Monsieur Claës, whose conscience recalled his past life, felt it to be a reproach, and his brow clouded.

The clerk began the reading. Balthazar's amazement increased as little by little the statement unfolded the facts. In the first place, the fortune of his wife at the time of her decease was declared to have been sixteen hundred thousand francs or thereabouts; and the summing up of the account showed clearly that the portion of each child was intact and as well-invested as if the best and wisest father had controlled it. In consequence of this the House of Claës was free from all lien, Balthazar was master of it; moreover, his rural property was likewise released from incumbrance. When all the papers connected with these matters were signed, Pierquin presented the receipts for the repayment of the moneys formerly borrowed, and releases of the various liens on the estates.

Balthazar, conscious that he had recovered the honor of his manhood, the life of a father, the dignity of a citizen, fell into a chair, and looked about for Marguerite; but she, with the instinctive delicacy of her sex, had left the room during the reading of the papers, as if to see that all the arrangements for the fête were properly prepared. Each member of the family understood the old man's wish when the failing humid eyes sought for the daughter, — who was seen by all present, with the eyes of the soul, as an angel of strength and light within the house. Gabriel went to find her. Hearing her step, Balthazar ran to clasp her in his arms.

"Father," she said, at the foot of the stairs, where the old man caught her and strained her to his breast, "I implore you not to lessen your sacred authority. Thank me before the family for carrying out your wishes, and be the sole author of the good that has been done here."

Balthazar lifted his eyes to heaven, then looked at his daughter, folded his arms, and said, after a pause, during which his face recovered an expression his children had not seen upon it for ten long years, —

"Pépita, why are you not here to praise our child!"

He strained Marguerite to him, unable to utter another word, and went back to the parlor.

"My children," he said, with the nobility of demeanor that in former days had made him so imposing, "we all owe gratitude and thanks to my daughter Marguerite for the wisdom and courage with which she has fulfilled my intentions and carried out my plans, when I, too absorbed by my labors, gave the reins of our domestic government into her hands."

"Ah, now!" cried Pierquin, looking at the clock, "we must read the marriage contracts. But they are not my affair, for the law forbids me to draw up such deeds between my relations and myself. Monsieur Raparlier is coming."

The friends of the family, invited to the dinner given to celebrate Claës's return and the signing of the marriage contracts, now began to arrive; and their servants brought in the wedding-presents. The company quickly assembled, and the scene was imposing as much from the quality of the persons present as from the elegance of the toilettes. The three families, thus united through the happiness of their children, seemed to vie with each other in contributing to the splendor of the occasion. The parlor was soon filled with the charming gifts that are made to bridal couples. Gold shimmered and glistened; silks and satins, cashmere shawls, necklaces, jewels, afforded as much delight to those who gave as to those who received; enjoyment that was almost childlike shone on every face, and the mere value of the magnificent presents was lost sight of by the spectators, — who often busy themselves in estimating it out of curiosity.

The ceremonial forms used for generations in the Claës family for solemnities of this nature now began. The parents alone were seated, all present stood before them at a little distance. To the left of the parlor on the garden side were Gabriel and Mademoiselle Conyncks, next to them stood Monsieur de Solis and Marguerite, and farther on, Félicie and Pierquin. Balthazar and Monsieur Conyncks, the only persons who were seated, occupied two armchairs beside the notary who, for this occasion, had taken Pierquin's duty. Jean stood behind his father. A score of ladies elegantly dressed, and a few men chosen from among the nearest relatives of the Pierquins, the Conyncks, and the Claës, the mayor of Douai, who was to marry the couples, the twelve witnesses chosen from among the nearest friends of the three families, all, even the curate of Saint-Pierre, remained standing and formed an imposing circle at the end of the parlor next the court-yard. This homage paid by the whole assembly to Paternity, which at such a moment shines with almost regal majesty, gave to the scene a certain antique character. It was the only moment for sixteen long years when Balthazar forgot the Alkahest.

Monsieur Raparlier went up to Marguerite and her sister and asked if all the persons invited to the ceremony and to the dinner had arrived; on receiving an affirmative reply, he returned to his station and took up the marriage contract between Marguerite and Monsieur de Solis, which was the first to be read, when suddenly the door of the parlor opened and Lemulquinier entered, his face flaming.

"Monsieur! monsieur!" he cried.

Balthazar flung a look of despair at Marguerite, then, making her a sign, he drew her into the garden. The whole assembly were conscious of a shock.

"I dared not tell you, my child," said the father, "but since you have done so much, you will save me, I know, from this last trouble. Lemulquinier lent me all his savings — the fruit of twenty years' economy — for my last experiment, which failed. He has come, no doubt, finding that I am once more rich, to insist on having them back. Ah! my angel, give them to him; you owe him your father; he alone consoled me in my troubles, he alone has had faith in me, — without him I should have died."

"Monsieur! monsieur!" cried Lemulquinier.

"What is it?" said Balthazar, turning round.

"A diamond!"

Claës sprang into the parlor and saw the stone in the hands of the old valet, who whispered in his ear, —

"I have been to the laboratory."

The chemist, forgetting everything about him, cast a terrible look on the old Fleming which meant, "You went before me to the laboratory!"

"Yes," continued Lemulquinier, "I found the diamond in the china capsule which communicated with the battery which we left to work, monsieur — and see!" he added, showing a white diamond of octahedral form, whose brilliancy drew the astonished gaze of all present.

"My children, my friends," said Balthazar, "forgive my old servant, forgive me! This event will drive me mad. The chance work of seven years has produced — without me — a discovery I have sought for sixteen years. How? My God, I know not — yes, I left sulphide of carbon under the influence of a Voltaic pile, whose action ought to have been watched from day to day. During my absence the power of God has worked in my laboratory, but I was not there to note its progressive effects! Is it not awful? Oh, cursed exile! cursed chance! Alas! had I watched that slow, that sudden — what can I call it? — crystallization, transformation, in short that miracle, then, then my children would have been richer still. Though this result is not the solution of the Problem which I seek, the first rays of my glory would have shone from that diamond upon my native country, and this hour, which our satisfied affections have made so happy, would have glowed with the sunlight of Science."

Every one kept silence in the presence of such a man. The disconnected words wrung from him by his anguish were too sincere not to be sublime.

Suddenly, Balthazar drove back his despair into the depths of his own being, and cast upon the assembly a majestic look which affected the souls of all; he took the diamond and offered it to Marguerite, saying, —

"It is thine, my angel."

Then he dismissed Lemulquinier with a gesture, and motioned to the notary, saying, "Go on."

The two words sent a shudder of emotion through the company such as Talma in certain rôles produced among his auditors. Balthazar, as he reseated himself, said in a low voice, —

"To-day I must be a father only."

Marguerite hearing the words went up to him and caught his hand and kissed it respectfully.

"No man was ever greater," said Emmanuel, when his bride returned to him; "no man was ever so mighty; another would have gone mad."

After the three contracts were read and signed, the company hastened to question Balthazar as to the manner in which the diamond had been formed; but he could tell them nothing about so strange an accident. He looked through the window at his garret and pointed to it with an angry gesture.

"Yes, the awful power resulting from a movement of fiery matter which no doubt produces metals, diamonds," he said, "was manifested there for one moment, by one chance."

"That chance was of course some natural effect," whispered a guest belonging to the class of people who are ready with an explanation of everything. "At any rate, it is something saved out of all he has wasted."

"Let us forget it," said Balthazar, addressing his friends; "I beg you to say no more about it to-day."

Marguerite took her father's arm to lead the way to the reception-rooms of the front house, where a sumptuous fête had been prepared. As he entered the gallery, followed by his guests, he beheld it filled with pictures and garnished with choice flowers.

"Pictures!" he exclaimed, "pictures! — and some of the old ones!"

He stopped short; his brow clouded; for a moment grief overcame him; he felt the weight of his wrong-doing as the vista of his humiliation came before his eyes.

"It is all your own, father," said Marguerite, guessing the feelings that oppressed his soul.

"Angel, whom the spirits in heaven watch and praise," he cried, "how many times have you given life to your father?"

"Then keep no cloud upon your brow, nor the least sad thought in your heart," she said, "and you will reward me beyond my hopes. I have been thinking of Lemulquinier, my darling father; the few words you said a little while ago have made me value him; perhaps I have been unjust to him; he ought to remain your humble friend. Emmanuel has laid by nearly sixty thousand francs which he has economized, and we will give them to Lemulquinier. After serving you so well the man ought to be made comfortable for his remaining years. Do not be uneasy about us. Monsieur de Solis and I intend to lead a quiet, peaceful life, — a life without luxury; we can well afford to lend you that money until you are able to return it."

"Ah, my daughter! never forsake me; continue to be thy father's providence."

When they entered the reception-rooms Balthazar found them restored and furnished as elegantly as in former days. The guests presently descended to the dining-room on the ground-floor by the grand staircase, on every step of which were rare plants and flowering shrubs. A silver service of exquisite workmanship, the gift of Gabriel to his father, attracted all eyes to a luxury which was surprising to the inhabitants of a town where such luxury is traditional. The servants of Monsieur Conyncks and of Pierquin, as well as those of the Claës household, were assembled to serve the repast. Seeing himself once more at the head of that table, surrounded by friends and relatives and happy faces beaming with heartfelt joy, Balthazar, behind whose chair stood Lemulquinier, was overcome by emotions so deep and so imposing that all present kept silence, as men are silent before great sorrows or great joys.

"Dear children," he cried, "you have killed the fatted calf to welcome home the prodigal father."

These words, in which the father judged himself (and perhaps prevented others from judging him more severely), were spoken so nobly that all present shed tears; they were the last expression of sadness, however, and the general happiness soon took on the merry, animated character of a family fête.

Immediately after dinner the principal people of the city began to arrive for the ball, which proved worthy of the almost classic splendor of the restored House of Claës. The three marriages followed this happy day, and gave occasion to many fêtes, and balls, and dinners, which involved Balthazar for some months in the vortex of social life. His eldest son and his wife removed to an estate near Cambrai belonging to Monsieur Conyncks, who was unwilling to separate from his daughter. Madame Pierquin also left her father's house to do the honors of a fine mansion which Pierquin had built, and where he desired to live in all the dignity of rank; for his practice was sold, and his uncle des Racquets had died and left him a large property scraped together by slow economy. Jean went to Paris to finish his education, and Monsieur and Madame de Solis alone remained with their father in the House of Claës. Balthazar made over to them the family home in the rear house, and took up his own abode on the second floor of the front building.

XVI.

MARGUERITE continued to keep watch over her father's material comfort, aided in the sweet task by Emmanuel. The noble girl received from the hands of love that most envied of all garlands, the wreath that happiness entwines and constancy keeps ever fresh. No couple ever afforded a better illustration of the complete, acknowledged, spotless felicity which all women cherish in their dreams. The union of two beings so courageous in the trials of life, who had loved each other through years with so sacred an affection, drew forth the respectful admiration of the whole community. Monsieur de Solis, who had long held an appointment as inspector-general of the University, resigned those functions to enjoy his happiness more freely, and remained at Douai where every one did such homage to his character and attainments that his name was proposed as candidate for the Electoral college whenever he should reach the required age. Marguerite, who had shown herself so strong in adversity, became in prosperity a sweet and tender woman.

Throughout the following year Claës was grave and preoccupied; and yet, though he made a few inexpensive experiments for which his ordinary income sufficed, he seemed to neglect his laboratory. Marguerite restored all the old customs of the House of Claës, and gave a family fête every month in honor of her father, at which the Pierquins and the Conyncks were present; and she also received the upper ranks of society one day in the week at a "café" which became celebrated. Though frequently absent-minded, Claës took part in all these assemblages and became, to please his daughter, so willingly a man of the world that the family were able to believe he had renounced his search for the solution of the great problem.

Three years went by. In 1828 family affairs called Emmanuel de Solis to Spain. Although there were three numerous branches between himself and the inheritance of the house of Solis, yellow fever, old age, barrenness, and other caprices of fortune, combined to make him the last lineal descendant of the family and heir to the titles and estates of his ancient house. Moreover, by one of those curious chances which seem impossible except in a book, the house of Solis had acquired the territory and titles of the Comtes de Nourho. Marguerite did not wish to separate from her husband, who was to stay in Spain long enough to settle his affairs, and she was, moreover, curious to see the castle of Casa-Réal where her mother had passed her childhood, and the city of Granada, the cradle of the de Solis family. She left Douai, consigning the care of the house to Martha, Josette, and Lemulquinier. Balthazar, to whom Marguerite had proposed a journey into Spain, declined to accompany her on the ground of his advanced age; but certain experiments which he had long meditated, and to which he now trusted for the realization of his hopes were the real reason of his refusal.

The Comte and Comtesse de Solis y Nourho were detained in Spain longer than they intended. Marguerite gave birth to a son. It was not until the middle of 1830 that they reached Cadiz, intending to embark for Italy on their way back to France. There, however, they received a letter from Félicie conveying disastrous news. Within a few months, their father had completely ruined himself. Gabriel and Pierquin were obliged to pay Lemulquinier a monthly stipend for the bare necessaries of the household. The old valet had again sacrificed his little property to his master. Balthazar was no longer willing to see any one, and would not even admit his children to the house. Martha and Josette were dead. The coachman, the cook, and the other servants had long been dismissed; the horses and carriages were sold. Though Lemulquinier maintained the utmost secrecy as to his master's proceedings, it was believed that the thousand francs supplied by Gabriel and Pierquin were spent chiefly on experiments. The small amount of provisions which the old valet purchased in the town seemed to show that the two old men contented themselves with the barest necessaries. To prevent the sale of the House of Claës, Gabriel and Pierquin were paying the interest of the sums which their father had again borrowed on it. None of his children had the slightest influence upon the old man, who at seventy years of age displayed extraordinary energy in bending everything to his will, even in matters that were trivial. Gabriel, Conyncks, and Pierquin had decided not to pay off his debts.

This letter changed all Marguerite's travelling plans, and she immediately took the shortest road to Douai. Her new fortune and her past savings enabled her to pay off Balthazar's debts; but she wished to do more, she wished to obey her mother's last injunction and save him from sinking dishonored to the grave. She alone could exercise enough ascendency over the old man to keep him from completing the work of ruin, at an age when no fruitful toil could be expected from his enfeebled faculties. But she was also anxious to control him without wounding his susceptibilities, — not wishing to imitate the children of Sophocles, in case her father neared the scientific result for which he had sacrificed so much.

Monsieur and Madame de Solis reached Flanders in the last days of September, 1831, and arrived at Douai during the morning. Marguerite ordered the coachman to drive to the house in the rue de Paris, which they found closed. The bell was loudly rung, but no one answered. A shopkeeper left his door-step, to which he had been attracted by the noise of the carriages; others were at their windows to enjoy a sight of the return of the de Solis family to whom all were attached, enticed also by a vague curiosity as to what would happen in that house on Marguerite's return to it. The shopkeeper told Monsieur de Solis's valet that old Claës had gone out an hour before, and that Monsieur Lemulquinier was no doubt taking him to walk on the ramparts.

Marguerite sent for a locksmith to force the door, — glad to escape a scene in case her father, as Félicie had written, should refuse to admit her into the house. Meantime Emmanuel went to meet the old man and prepare him for the arrival of his daughter, despatching a servant to notify Monsieur and Madame Pierquin.

When the door was opened, Marguerite went directly to the parlor. Horror overcame her and she trembled when she saw the walls as bare as if a fire had swept over them. The glorious carved panellings of Van Huysum and the portrait of the great Claës had been sold. The dining-room was empty: there was nothing in it but two straw chairs and a common deal table, on which Marguerite, terrified, saw two plates, two bowls, two forks and spoons, and the remains of a salt herring which Claës and his servant had evidently just eaten. In a moment she had flown through her father's portion of the house, every room of which exhibited the same desolation as the parlor and dining-room. The idea of the Alkahest had swept like a conflagration through the building. Her father's bedroom had a bed, one chair, and one table, on which stood a miserable pewter candlestick with a tallow candle burned almost to the socket. The house was so completely stripped that not so much as a curtain remained at the windows. Every object of the smallest value, — everything, even the kitchen utensils, had been sold.

Moved by that feeling of curiosity which never entirely leaves us even in moments of misfortune, Marguerite entered Lemulquinier's chamber and found it as bare as that of his master. In a half-opened table-drawer she saw a pawnbroker's ticket for the old servant's watch which he had pledged some days before. She ran to the laboratory and found it filled with scientific instruments, the same as ever. Then she returned to her own appartement and ordered the door to be broken open — her father had respected it!

Marguerite burst into tears and forgave her father all. In the midst of his devastating fury he had stopped short, restrained by paternal feeling and the gratitude he owed to his daughter! This proof of tenderness, coming to her at a moment when despair had reached its climax, brought about in Marguerite's soul one of those moral reactions against which the coldest hearts are powerless. She returned to the parlor to wait her father's arrival, in a state of anxiety that was cruelly aggravated by doubt and uncertainty. In what condition was she about to see him? Ruined, decrepit, suffering, enfeebled by the fasts his pride compelled him to undergo? Would he have his reason? Tears flowed unconsciously from her eyes as she looked about the desecrated sanctuary. The images of her whole life, her past efforts, her useless precautions, her childhood, her mother happy and unhappy, — all, even her little Joseph smiling on that scene of desolation, all were parts of a poem of unutterable melancholy.

Marguerite foresaw an approaching misfortune, yet she little expected the catastrophe which was about to close her father's life, — that life at once so grand and yet so miserable.

The condition of Monsieur Claës was no secret in the community. To the lasting shame of men, there were not in all Douai two hearts generous enough to do honor to the perseverance of this man of genius. In the eyes of the world Balthazar was a man to be condemned, a bad father who had squandered six fortunes, millions, who was actually seeking the philosopher's stone in the nineteenth century, this enlightened century, this sceptical century, this century! — etc. They calumniated his purposes and branded him with the name of "alchemist," casting up to him in mockery that he was trying to make gold. Ah! what eulogies are uttered on this great century of ours, in which, as in all the others, genius is smothered under an indifference as brutal as that of the age in which Dante died, and Tasso and Cervantes and *tutti quanti*. The people are as backward as kings in understanding the creations of genius.

These opinions on the subject of Balthazar Claës filtered, little by little, from the upper society of Douai to the bourgeoisie, and from the bourgeoisie to the lower classes. The old chemist excited pity among persons of his own rank, satirical curiosity among the others, — two sentiments big with contempt and with the *vae victis* with which the masses assail a man of genius when they see him in misfortune. Persons often stopped before the House of Claës to show each other the rose window of the garret where so much gold and so much coal had been consumed in smoke. When Balthazar passed along the streets they pointed to him with their fingers; often, on catching sight of him, a mocking jest or a word of pity would escape the lips of a workingman or some mere child. But Lemulquinier was careful to tell his master it was homage; he could deceive him with impunity, for though the old man's eyes retained the sublime clearness which results from the habit of living among great thoughts, his sense of hearing was enfeebled.

To most of the peasantry, and to all vulgar and superstitious minds, Balthazar Claës was a sorcerer. The noble old mansion, once named by common consent "the House of Claës," was now called in the suburbs and the country districts "the Devil's House." Every outward sign, even the face of Lemulquinier, confirmed the ridiculous beliefs that were current about Balthazar. When the old servant went to market to purchase the few provisions necessary for their subsistence, picking out the cheapest he could find, insults were flung in as make-weights, — just as butchers slip bones into their customers' meat, — and he was fortunate, poor creature, if some superstitious market-woman did not refuse to sell him his meagre pittance lest she be damned by contact with an imp of hell.

Thus the feelings of the whole town of Douai were hostile to the grand old man and to his attendant. The neglected state of their clothes added to this repulsion; they went about clothed like paupers who have seen better days, and who strive to keep a decent appearance and are ashamed to beg. It was probable that sooner or later Balthazar would be insulted in the streets. Pierquin, feeling how degrading to the family any public insult would be, had for some time past sent two or three of his own servants to follow the old man whenever he went out, and keep him in sight at a little distance, for the purpose of protecting him if necessary, — the revolution of July not having contributed to make the citizens respectful.

By one of those fatalities which can never be explained, Claës and Lemulquinier had gone out early in the morning, thus evading the secret guardianship of Monsieur and Madame Pierquin. On their way back from the ramparts they sat down to sun themselves on a bench in the place Saint-Jacques, an open space crossed by children on their way to school. Catching sight from a distance of the defenceless old men, whose faces brightened as they sat basking in the sun, a crowd of boys began to talk of them. Generally, children's chatter ends in laughter; on this occasion the laughter led to jokes of which they did not know the cruelty. Seven or eight of the first-comers stood at a little distance, and examined the strange old faces with smothered laughter and remarks which attracted Lemulquinier's attention.

"Hi! do you see that one with a head as smooth as my knee?"

"Yes."

"Well, he was born a Wise Man."

"My papa says he makes gold," said another.

The youngest of the troop, who had his basket full of provisions and was devouring a slice of bread and butter, advanced to the bench and said boldly to Lemulquinier, —

"Monsieur, is it true you make pearls and diamonds?"

"Yes, my little man," replied the valet, smiling and tapping him on the cheek; "we will give you some if you study well."

"Ah! monsieur, give me some, too," was the general exclamation.

The boys all rushed together like a flock of birds, and surrounded the old men. Balthazar, absorbed in meditation from which he was drawn by these sudden cries, made a gesture of amazement which caused a general shout of laughter.

"Come, come, boys; be respectful to a great man," said Lemulquinier.

"Hi, the old harlequin!" cried the lads; "the old sorcerer! you are sorcerers! sorcerers! sorcerers!"

Lemulquinier sprang to his feet and threatened the crowd with his cane; they all ran to a little distance, picking up stones and mud. A workman who was eating his breakfast near by, seeing Lemulquinier brandish his cane to drive the boys away, thought he had struck them, and took their part, crying out, —

"Down with the sorcerers!"

The boys, feeling themselves encouraged, flung their missiles at the old men, just as the Comte de Solis, accompanied by Pierquin's servants, appeared at the farther end of the square. The latter were too late, however, to save the old man and his valet from being pelted with mud. The shock was given. Balthazar, whose faculties had been preserved by a chastity of spirit natural to students absorbed in a quest of discovery that annihilates all passions, now suddenly divined, by the phenomenon of introsusception, the true meaning of the scene: his decrepit body could not sustain the frightful reaction he underwent in his feelings, and he fell, struck with paralysis, into the arms of Lemulquinier, who brought him to his home on a shutter, attended by his sons-in-law and their servants. No power could prevent the population of Douai from following the body of the old man to the door of his house, where Félicie and her children, Jean, Marguerite, and Gabriel, whom his sister had sent for, were waiting to receive him.

The arrival of the old man gave rise to a frightful scene; he struggled less against the assaults of death than against the horror of seeing that his children had entered the house and penetrated the secret of his impoverished life. A bed was at once made up in the parlor and every care bestowed upon the stricken man, whose condition, towards evening, allowed hopes that his life might be preserved. The paralysis, though skilfully treated, kept him for some time in a state of semi-childhood; and when by degrees it relaxed, the tongue was found to be especially affected, perhaps because the old man's anger had concentrated all his forces upon it at the moment when he was about to apostrophize the children.

This incident roused a general indignation throughout the town. By a law, up to that time unknown, which guides the affections of the masses, this event brought back all hearts to Monsieur Claës. He became once more a great man; he excited the admiration and received the good-will that a few hours earlier were denied to him. Men praised his patience, his strength of will, his courage, his genius. The authorities wished to arrest all those who had a share in dealing him this blow. Too late, — the evil was done! The Claës family were the first to beg that the matter might be allowed to drop.

Marguerite ordered furniture to be brought into the parlor, and the denuded walls to be hung with silk; and when, a few days after his seizure, the old father recovered his faculties and found himself once more in a luxurious room surrounded by all that makes life easy, he tried to express his belief that his daughter Marguerite had returned. At that moment she entered the room. When Balthazar caught sight of her he colored, and his eyes grew moist, though the tears did not fall.

He was able to press his daughter's hand with his cold fingers, putting into that pressure all the thoughts, all the feelings he no longer had the power to utter. There was something holy and solemn in that farewell of the brain which still lived, of the heart which gratitude revived. Worn out by fruitless efforts, exhausted in the long struggle with the gigantic problem, desperate perhaps at the oblivion which awaited his memory, this giant among men was about to die. His children surrounded him with respectful affection; his dying eyes were cheered with images of plenty and the touching picture of his prosperous and noble family. His every look — by which alone he could manifest his feelings — was unchangeably affectionate; his eyes acquired such variety of expression that they had, as it were, a language of light, easy to comprehend.

Marguerite paid her father's debts, and restored a modern splendor to the House of Claës which removed all outward signs of its decay. She never left the old man's bedside, endeavoring to divine his every thought and accomplish his slightest wish.

Some months went by with those alternations of better and worse which attend the struggle of life and death in old people; every morning his children came to him and spent the day in the parlor, dining by his bedside and only leaving him when he went to sleep for the night. The occupation which gave him most pleasure, among the many with which his family sought to enliven him, was the reading of newspapers, to which the political events then occurring gave a special interest. Monsieur Claës listened attentively as Monsieur de Solis read them aloud beside his bed.

Towards the close of the year 1832, Balthazar passed an extremely critical night, during which Monsieur Pierquin, the doctor, was summoned by the nurse, who was greatly alarmed at the sudden change which took place in the patient. For the rest of the night the doctor remained to watch him, fearing he might at any moment expire in the throes of inward convulsion, whose effects were like those of a last agony.

The old man made incredible efforts to shake off the bonds of his paralysis; he tried to speak and moved his tongue, unable to make a sound; his flaming eyes emitted thoughts; his drawn features expressed an untold agony; his fingers writhed in desperation; the sweat stood in drops upon his brow. In the morning when his children came to his bedside and kissed him with an affection which the sense of coming death made day by day more ardent and more eager, he showed none of his usual satisfaction at these signs of their tenderness. Emmanuel, instigated by the doctor, hastened to open the newspaper to try if the usual reading might not relieve the inward crisis in which Balthazar was evidently struggling. As he unfolded the sheet he saw the words, "DISCOVERY OF THE ABSOLUTE," — which startled him, and he read a paragraph to Marguerite concerning a sale made by a celebrated Polish mathematician of the secret of the Absolute. Though Emmanuel read in a low voice, and Marguerite signed to him to omit the passage, Balthazar heard it.

Suddenly the dying man raised himself by his wrists and cast on his frightened children a look which struck like lightning; the hairs that fringed the bald head stirred, the wrinkles quivered, the features were illumined with spiritual fires, a breath passed across that face and rendered it sublime; he raised a hand, clenched in fury, and uttered with a piercing cry the famous word of Archimedes, "EUREKA!" — I have found.

He fell back upon his bed with the dull sound of an inert body, and died, uttering an awful moan, — his convulsed eyes expressing to the last, when the doctor closed them, the regret of not bequeathing to Science the secret of an Enigma whose veil was rent away, — too late! — by the fleshless fingers of Death.

DALZIEL BROTHERS, CAMDEN PRESS, LONDON, N.W.

[*From the* New York Tribune *of October 13, 1885.*]

BALZAC IN ENGLISH.

PÈRE GORIOT. Honoré de Balzac.

To understand Balzac thoroughly, indeed, he must be read in the original and as a whole. Selected pieces from the "Comédie Humaine" may convey a sufficiently clear apprehension, for the public, of his powers, but a careful study of that wonderful scheme throughout is indispensable to a real knowledge of his aim and scope. The "Comédie Humaine" is the most remarkable work of its kind extant. It is not mere fiction. It is, as Balzac intended it to be, a faithful history of the France of his time ; a history so faithful and so detailed that were all other contemporary literature destroyed, posterity could from this work reconstruct an exact and finished picture of the age. In his general preface (which the publishers have judiciously prefixed to their translation of "Père Goriot") the author gives some account of his plan. His aim was to do for society what Buffon had done for the animal kingdom. Since, however, men and women are complex creatures, and since their acts and sufferings are caused mainly by the influence of passions whose treatment demands a profound study of psychology, it is evident that the task of the novelist, or, as he might be better named, the social historian, must be much more difficult than that of the naturalist.

Balzac, however, supported by that confidence in its own powers which so often characterizes genius, grappled boldly with this arduous undertaking. He was to write the history of his time, nothing extenuating, and setting down naught in malice, painting in their due proportions the vices and the virtues of the period, showing the springs that moved society, the passions that furnished motives to actions, the meannesses, the magnanimities, the rapacity, the self-sacrifice, the sensuality, the purity, the piety, the heathenism of his fellow men and women. His equipment for the work was splendid. His erudition was both extensive and curious. He knew not only common but recondite things. In science he had outstripped his generation. In the "Comédie Humaine" may be recognized the practical embodiment of evolutionary philosophy. The influence of the environment upon character and conduct is always insisted upon by him. And because he never loses sight of the natural processes through which character is moulded and changed, his characters possess a peculiar reality and vitality. To him they were indeed living, and the rare faculty by which, in the alembic of his mind, all the complex influences and agencies concerned went to form, complete, and vivify these creations, has endowed them with so strong an individuality that they live and move still for the reader. Nothing that belonged to Balzac's time escaped him, and he explored the obscurer lines of research as conscientiously as those more open and clear. Thus it is that there is to be found in his works references to what are now thought the supernatural theories of the day, and he has sounded the depths of mysticism with the same devotion shown in his pursuit of physical science.

Critics have regretted that he had no high moral aim; but this regret seems to imply misapprehension of his purpose not less than error as to his achievements. His aim was to describe life as it was being lived under his eyes. That his tendencies were not debasing is shown by the striking contrast between his work and that of Zola. In the latter's writings the ugly, vile, and horrible is so elaborated, exaggerated, and kept in the foreground that it colours and characterizes everything. In Balzac there is not less realism, and nothing more graphic than his descriptions of the seamy side of life has ever been written. But there is no taint of lubricity, and no suggestion of liking for the scenes so depicted. A sombre fire runs through all the pictures of low and vicious life, which, while enhancing the skill of the artist, moves to pity or indignation because of the destinies so sadly fixed. Perhaps no better example of his style than "Père Goriot" could be selected. Père Goriot is the Lear of modern society; and though the passions which move the characters are for the most part sordid and base, the pathos and power of the story are so great, that even in translation the genius of the master is unmistakable. There is nothing in fiction more pitiful than the figure of old Goriot, and the skill of the creator, which sets down all the defects and limitations of the hero, thereby accentuates his devotion and the ignoble tragedy of his fate.

Balzac, however, never adopted the modern vice known as the "star system" in dramatic management. There were no "sticks" in his company. Every character is complete, intelligible, consistent, progressive. Neither does he pad. From beginning to end, save as regards his descriptions of things and places, every sentence has direct relation to the working out of the plot. And as to those long and minute descriptions, which have vexed some critics, they were written with the distinct and avowed purpose of preserving faithful likenesses which should be of use to the historian of the future. Nor are they tiresome, but often seem to sharpen the realization of the story, and in all cases increase the general impression of fidelity to facts. *The style of Balzac is very remarkable for its power. It is nervous, full of suppressed fire, suggesting a brain so prolific of thoughts that the utmost care had to be exercised to prevent them from overcrowding one another. The concentrated force of expression frequently reminds one of Shakespeare, and bursts of marvellous impassioned eloquence—not of the frothy kind, but presenting truths deep as the centre—at intervals flash out, adding to the sense of repressed volcanic power which pervades these works.*

The defects of Balzac are those of his time and country. It is curious that while he himself finds no really lofty female characters in English fiction, even belittling the heroines of Scott, and advancing the strange theory that the neglect by Protestant peoples of the worship of the Virgin has lowered their standard of womanhood, his own most ambitious types of piety and purity in woman exhibit less of his characteristic knowledge of human nature than any of his other characters. This type, in fact, he appears to have described from pure imagination, with the result that his creations of this class are cold, unapproachable, abnormal, bloodless beings, whose goodness does not impress us as meritorious, because they are essentially incapable of wrong-doing. In a word, he has filled up the vacant niche with conventional angels, only removing their wings. As to the low plane of the ambitions which move so many of his characters, no doubt he would have said that he merely took the world as he found it; that these were the prevailing ambitions, and that he could not make society better than it was. And doubtless there is much force in this, though it must be acknowledged that the France of Balzac's time afforded almost as abundant material for satire as the Rome of Juvenal.

Taking him at his own estimate, however, and accepting his view of the duties of the novelist under the given conditions—a view, be it said, which is always open to doubt and dispute—it is impossible not to admire the depth of his insight and the marvellous scope and comprehensiveness of his genius. The enterprise he undertook was gigantic, yet what he accomplished was so monumental a work as to prove the justness of his self-appreciation. Some day, perhaps, a complete translation of the "Comédie Humaine" will be undertaken. "César Birotteau," and one or two more of Balzac's stories, have been put into English already, though inadequately. There ought to be, in the United States and England, at the present time enough lovers of good literature to make such an undertaking as a complete translation of this author remunerative. When we consider what masses of trash pour from modern presses, and what capital is employed in reproductions of so-called classics which have become rare and obscure because they deserved oblivion, it seems reasonable to expect that Balzac would find purchasers if issued in the form suggested.

The translation of "Père Goriot" is very good, and Balzac is not the easiest author to translate. The publishers cannot do better than to intrust the succeeding volumes to the same capable hands, and it would be only justice to the translator to put his or her name on the title-page; for it is a meritorious deed to have turned into excellent, nervous English the prose of this great Frenchman, whose fire and fervour, clear sight and powerful description, when contrasted with the average novel of the day, shine forth with redoubled splendour, and whose brilliant genius in the analysis of human character casts altogether into the shade the amateurish essays at psychologic fiction which are gravely spoken of in these degenerate times as the promising productions of a new and higher school of literary art.

From The Art Interchange, *a Household Journal, for February 13, 1886.*

THE DUCHESSE DE LANGEAIS,

WITH

An Episode under the Terror, The Illustrious Gaudissart
A Passion in the Desert, and A Hidden Masterpiece.

By HONORÉ DE BALZAC.

Since the days when Thackeray and Dickens were issuing in numbers those novels which have delighted so many readers, or George Eliot's publishers were able to announce a new novel from her pen, there has been no series of novels given to the public so notable and so well worthy of wide attention on the part of adult readers as this translation of Balzac. If it be objected, as it perhaps will be, that there is a flavour of immorality in Balzac, and that his works are not well adapted to general reading, it can be shown, we think, at least so far as the charge of immorality is concerned, that the objection is a superficial one; and that while there is much in the times and society which form the groundwork of Balzac's marvellous stories that is improper, and fortunately counter to our civilization, still, Balzac's tone concerning these very things is a healthy one, and his belief in purity and goodness, his faith in the possibilities of humanity, is too clear to admit of a question. He gives us wonderful pictures of the world he lived in. It was not altogether a good world. As it was, he portrays it. Its virtues he praises, and its vices he condemns —not by a page of mere moralizing, but by events and action, which, swaying the ethics of society with apparent uncertainty hither and thither, yet have an upward tread, even as they do in our world of to-day. "The Duchesse de Langeais" is the novel of this volume. It is from the Scènes de la Vie Parisienne of the Comédie Humaine. The temptation and struggle of the Duchess is one which could hardly, in our day, present itself to a pure-minded woman. In that day and time it could, and did. In spite of her wild abandonment to the lover who spurned her, the reader feels that Madame de

Langeais was a noble-hearted woman, purer than those who counselled her a concealed enjoyment of her passion, nobler and better than the society which made her what she was. With great power and pathos is her story told. It is a very powerful scene when her lover meets her in the convent, and very dramatic is her tortured cry to the Mother Superior, "This man is my lover!" How strong and pitiful the end, and the sad commitment to the waves of what was a woman and now is nothing! The volume also contains four short stories. "An Episode under the Terror," from Scènes de la Vie Politique, is a story already familiar from previous translation, which has drifted around in English as much perhaps as any of Balzac's shorter stories. "The Illustrious Gaudissart" is from Scènes de la Vie de Province, an admirable example of Balzac's humour. Gaudissart is a commercial traveller—a drummer, in familiar parlance. He might be a drummer of to-day. If he were he could easily find employment with a high-class house. The shrewdness and impudence of the class has not varied much since Balzac's time. Gaudissart adds to his line a children's magazine and the agency of a Life Insurance Company. He is advised by the humorist of a provincial town to try his powers of persuasion on a man who turns out to be a harmless but decided lunatic. The scene between the two is humorous in the extreme. When Gaudissart calls the insuring one's life for a large sum "the discounting of future genius," he adds a persuasive phrase to the répertoire of the life-insurance agent. "A Passion in the Desert" is from Scènes de la Vie Militaire, and is as singular a tale as might be imagined from the affection of a man and a tiger. The last of the four is "The Hidden Masterpiece," from Etudes Philosophiques. Here, to the readers of this edition, Balzac is seen in a new vein. Here is something of the strange, weird touch of Hawthorne, something of unreality, and the lingering vision of a possible moral. The translation could hardly be in better hands. The English is delightfully clear and nervous. Whoever reads these books will know Balzac very well, and it is safe to assume that they will like him very much.

EUGÉNIE GRANDET.

A GREAT NOVEL.

"Honoré de Balzac wrote many books to each of which this title may justly be applied. We apply it in the present instance to 'Eugénie Grandet,' one of his very greatest works, one which—in the opinion of a large number of persons—divides with 'Le Père Goriot' the honour of being his masterpiece. Englishmen are prone to hold that in English fiction there is no such beautiful and complete embodiment of a good woman as Fielding's Amelia; Frenchmen, we should fancy, must ascribe a similar position to Eugénie Grandet. The book of which she is the central figure, the Rembrandt-contrast to the ignoble spirits by whom she is surrounded, has been beyond a doubt one of the most widely-read of French novels; and now that it has been rendered into excellent English, and presented in a highly attractive form, it will undoubtedly pass into the mental experience of a multitude who would otherwise have lacked more than a hearsay knowledge of its beauty. The translation of the novels so far published deserves more than the mere word that can be given to it here. Although French is a language much easier to read than German, it is a far more difficult task to turn French prose into idiomatic English prose than to do the same by German, and we do not remember ever to have seen any translation of French into English which is so near being uniformly idiomatic as these versions of Balzac now under consideration."—*Boston Post.*

"Not to know Balzac Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson has declared to be an ignorance 'that will soon be excuseless, and we hope rare.' Not to know Balzac is certainly to lose one of the highest intellectual pleasures, and to shut out one of the profoundest educational forces of literature in this century. Balzac's work is throughout full of power."—*Brooklyn Times.*

"This volume comes to us as the fourth in the series of translations of Balzac's novels. His sketches of character are nowhere more strong and masterly than in this book, where he depicts the miser, Grandet, in all the repulsiveness which belongs to a narrow, grasping, and unscrupulous nature, in contrast with his patient, long-suffering, repressed, but faithful and tender wife. Their only child, Eugénie, is the heroine of the story; and her strong, simple, and loving nature, which leads her to sacrifice her future for a brilliant but unworthy cousin, who wins her heart, and then forgets her in his search for a more ambitious alliance, furnishes a theme where Balzac's literary skill and keen analysis of motives are seen at their best. We regret that the name of the translator has not been made public, for his work is well done, and deserves special commendation in these days, when so many poor translations of foreign works are offered to the public."—*Portland Press.*

The *Athenæum* says of the translation of Balzac which Messrs. Routledge are publishing, that it is "very much above the average of English translation of French."

COUSIN PONS.

"It is late in the day to speak of the genius of Balzac, but it is worth while to commend the reader to the admirable translation of a number of his works issued by Messrs. Routledge. The work of Miss Wormeley, whose name does not appear upon the title-page, but who is said to be the translator, is deserving of the highest praise. Balzac's intensely idiomatic French, as well as his occasional treatment of recondite subjects, and his frequent elucidation of complicated business transactions, render the translation of his works difficult; but the present translator has turned the original into clear and fluent English, reading not at all like a translation, yet preserving Balzac's vigorous and characteristic style. It is not only the best translation of Balzac which we have—which would not be high praise, since English versions of his novels have hitherto been few and fragmentary—but one of the most excellent translations of any French author which we have met. The publishers have laid the readers under obligation, both by undertaking the enterprise of presenting Balzac in an English dress, and by their selection of a translator; and it is most desirable that they should complete the work so well begun by putting within the reach of English-speaking readers the remainder of that marvellous body of fiction, 'The Comédie Humaine.'"—*The Church Review.*

"'Cousin Pons' is the latest translation in the Balzac series now being issued by Messrs. Routledge. It is a strong story of friendship and of greed. To all intents and purposes the narrative indicates a complete and perfect triumph of vice over virtue; but vice is painted in such hideous colours, and virtue is shown in such effulgent beauty, as to make the moral well-nigh awe-inspiring. Balzac does not stay the natural course of events. He permits each character to work out its own results, and then makes the impression desired by comparative methods. In this, as in all his works, the wonderful writer manifests a familiarity with the ethics of life which has gained for him the eternal remembrance and gratitude of all readers; and it is fair to presume that the Balzac now being translated will revive his name and bring again to his feet the world of English-speaking people."—*Springfield Republican.*

"The last translation from Balzac is one of the famous Frenchman's most original stories. It is, in fact, one of the most extraordinary and original novels ever written, and only the mind of a genius could have conceived such a peculiar plot. The heroine of the novel—for whom the principal character sacrifices his comfort, his pleasure, and, indeed, his life; for whom many other characters in the book sacrifice their honour; and around whom all the excitement and interest centres—is, strangely enough, *not* a woman; and yet this heroine calls forth the most ardent and passionate devotion a man is capable of, and her influence is elevating and not degrading. The manner in which a mania of any kind can absorb a man, body and soul, is wonderfully brought out in 'Cousin Pons'; for the heroine of the book is a collector of curios."

"Those who have formed a hasty judgment of Balzac from reading the 'Duchesse de Langeais' would do well to read 'Cousin Pons.' Balzac sees and depicts virtue as perfectly as vice, and it is his faculty of describing beauty as well as ugliness which has made him famous. The delicacy of perception which enabled him to perceive and describe every shade of feeling in 'Cousin Pons' and to appreciate the nobility of Schmucke's character is the chief characteristic of genius. The reader must read all the 'Scenes from Parisian Life' to have any full conception of Balzac's greatness. His breadth of vision, his dramatic power, his searching analysis of the most transient emotions, and his quick perceptions of beauty, are all evident in 'Cousin Pons.' It is an interesting, exciting novel, a perfect piece of literary execution, and a story which is, if sad, neither coarse nor immoral."—*Boston Transcript.*

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